



THE CHILD *in*
THE CHURCH
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THE
CHILD IN THE CHURCH

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THE CHILD IN THE CHURCH

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TO
MY MOTHER

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE CHILD	9
II. THE CHILD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	21
III. THE CHILD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	33
IV. THE NEW TESTAMENT POSITION EX- PANDED	44
V. RIVAL THEORIES CONTRASTED .	56
VI. DOCTRINAL ISSUES	66
VII. BAPTISM	77
VIII. THE CHILD IN THE HOME . .	89
IX. HOW THE CHILD MAY REALISE HIS MEMBERSHIP	99
X. THE CHILD IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL	109

THE CHILD IN THE CHURCH

CHAPTER I

THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE CHILD

NOT very long ago, among the Protestant Churches of a certain locality which were anxious to cultivate a spirit of brotherly union, an effort was made to unite in a Sunday afternoon service for children. The aim of every Church being to make the children better acquainted with the children's great Friend, it was expected that in such a united service no denominational questions would arise, and no doctrinal issues be involved. But a very few meetings were sufficient to dissipate this pious hope. One speaker addressed his juvenile audience as Christians on one Sunday, and on the next another speaker addressed them as heathen. The deliberate object of one was to convert to Christ, of the other to educate in Christ. Radically different

conceptions of the status of the children were revealed ; and in their interest and the interest of all others concerned, the attempt was abandoned.

Now such differences of opinion concerning the status of the child as this effort disclosed among the different Protestant Churches are to be discovered, by any one who has eyes to see, in each separate Protestant community. Meeting a prominent Methodist preacher lately, I put to him the question : " What is the view of your Church regarding the position of the children of Christian parents ? " And he replied, " Well, I am afraid there are three separate and distinct views upon that subject, maybe indeed four." Of the Episcopalian Church a similar statement might perhaps be made with equal truth. The High Church party in it have one conception, the Broad Church another, and the Low Church yet another ; each of them determined to a large extent by the interpretation which is put upon the Sacrament of baptism.

Other evangelical Churches are no more favourably situated in this respect, notwithstanding express statements upon the subject which occur in their standards. Disregarded by many members, interpreted in one way by some and in another way by others, such statements have done little to give to religious education a fixed unity of purpose. Some Churches indeed which have been very zealous for the honour of other portions of their creed have permitted a strange laxity in this, and have been willing

enough to allow good men to experiment with their children, and to treat their doctrinal statements regarding them, just as they pleased. At the present time, as it appears to me, three rival opinions are in the field.

One party in the Church believes that all children are children of wrath, aliens from God, who must consciously convert before they can win His favour ; and that this being impossible in the early years of infancy, their religious education can be prospective only. Those who hold this position, when pressed for proof of it, point to certain passages in the Word of God or perhaps in the Westminster Confession of Faith. If " without faith it is impossible to please Him " ; if all are born " utterly opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil " : is not the conclusion irresistible that children are naturally prodigals, and that they must grow up and return ? Religious education in the real sense of the word education is impossible. There is room for religious teaching in such a theory, but not for religious education. To " educate," " to draw out " of a wholly depraved heart anything but depravity is as impossible as to draw anything but mud out of a stagnant well. The child must grow and become a conscious agent before he can be God's child ; and whilst he is growing the Christian parent must wait. He cannot be an intermediary between God and his child, for God deals with souls individually and directly. That is one theory ; and among those who hold it

little store is set by Baptism. If the Sacrament possess any value at all, it is prospective only.

On the other hand some members of the Church believe that the children of Christian parents are, in virtue of their parents' faith, in a relationship to God that is anything but one of alienation. They maintain that such children are born into a state of reconciliation ; and that they may, and ought to, grow up into Christ, gradually and even unconsciously appropriating Him. It is a deplorable thing, they hold, for the Church to lose them even for a time, or to allow them to wander at all ; and a yet more deplorable thing that the Church and Christian parents should expect to lose them, as though that were a part of God's plan for them. The defenders of this theory also point to the Scriptures and, if they are familiar with it, to the Confession of Faith. They claim that the teaching of the New Testament is in line with the teaching of the Old Testament on this subject ; and that if Christ's attitude toward children is allowed to determine the question of the status of the child, it will settle it in this way. They point to the fact that in the Confession of Faith the children of believing parents are included in the membership of the Church ; which must mean that their position is different from that of other children, and must carry with it the presumption that they are at least not aliens, otherwise membership is quite unintelligible. They believe that a child's youth is no

obstacle to the grace of God, which can be bestowed either directly or mediately through the channel of the parents' faith. To these the Sacrament of baptism is rich with significance. It affirms a great and welcome truth, and seals it home to their hearts.

There is still another class, intermediate between these two, whose position on the subject may be defined as agnostic. How the child stands they do not know. It seems to them that God has revealed His will clearly only concerning adults. All efforts at religious education are tentative, and are made in the dark. All discussions upon the subject are fruitless, empty theorising. Let the child be taught a little religion as he is taught any other subject, and "we shall see what we shall see." They allow neither the future hopes which belong to the first class to determine their actions, nor the present assurance of the second class to solace their hearts. As kind to their children as any, perhaps more indulgent than any, they simply put a note of interrogation after the question of their position before God, and leave it to others to teach them what they like. They still observe Baptism, but they make no secret of the fact that they do not know what it means, and indignantly repudiate, as though to cover their inconsistency, any superstitious idea about its value.

These three theories are to be found at work among us. In the same Sunday school children

are being taught in one class that they cannot please God till they get a new heart, and in another that they can please Him now. In the same Church some children are made to feel, and to rejoice in the fact, that they, through their parents' faith, are Church members ; and others are made to feel that they, in spite of their parents' faith, are outsiders. In the same congregation are some parents who train their children as already Christians in the becoming, and others who train them solely for conversion. Religious education in church and school and home is determined by, and proceeds upon, some theory of the child's spiritual standing and spiritual susceptibility ; and, when several rival theories are in the field, the result is carelessness and confusion among parents and teachers, and perplexity, bewilderment, and loss to the child.

When one looks attentively at these two divergent views—the third is really not a view but rather an absence of view—it becomes clear that they differ because of the different emphasis which they place upon the value of the individual and of the family. It is the old question of individualism and solidarity. In the one position emphasis is laid upon the separateness and distinctness of each single soul ; in the other, the relation and dependence of one soul upon others is the prominent idea. The one sees the child alone in the nakedness of his own personality, the other sees him clothed upon with the family relationships. The one affirms that

God deals with him by himself, and that he must himself, for himself, deal with God ; the other says that, in his pupilage, God can and does deal with him through others. It is really a question of emphasis. Those who emphasise individualism end in the one view, and those who emphasise solidarity in the other.

Among the causes which have contributed to emphasise one or other of these two aspects in recent years, I would mention two—Evangelicalism and Child-Psychology. In succeeding waves, some higher some lower, Evangelicalism has been passing over our country during the past half century, solving many problems, and creating many ; bringing to the front the great truths of the freeness of God's grace and the value of present salvation, and tending to obscure other great truths, no less vital to a full Christian faith. The emphasis which it has placed upon the individual in God's sight, and upon the necessity of a deliberate and immediate response to the offer of salvation, has been its most distinctive feature. The family, the kingdom, the Church, are conceptions not natural to it. The individual is everything. And so some people who see only through its spectacles have come to look upon the little child as a separate and distinct unit, standing apart from his parents' faith, alone and unrepresented before God. Then, too, in emphasising so strongly one type of religious experience, Evangelicalism has left the impression on some minds that no other

type is possible. It has led men to suppose, in spite of the New Testament evidence to the contrary, that the Christian life must always begin in the same way, and that a sudden way ; to forget the experience of Peter and John, and to remember only the experience of Paul. The child must be compelled to go through the same gate as the grown-up man, even as the hardened sinner, and similar experiences must be demanded of him. He must conform to the type.

If Evangelicalism has emphasised the individualistic view of the status of the child, and pressed it forward in recent years, the study of child-nature has yielded strong support to the other view. Psychology has given its strength to this department of its subject, and has brought in conclusions which are revolutionising the education and training of children. It has accentuated the truth that so far from coming into life a conscious responsible agent, the child enters it in a condition of complete dependence. He is not a man. He cannot be studied as a man, but as a child. He cannot be responsible as a man, but as a child. He cannot be educated as a man, but as a child. His moral nature is not made ; it is in the process of making, and so is his religious nature. It would be deemed ridiculous to expect from him the experiences of a full-grown man in any other sphere, and it is no less ridiculous in the religious. In a word, Psychology seeks to save the child from an extreme individualism. When it finds him

wandering alone it takes him back, and puts him into the shelter of the home. It unites him again to his parents, and reads them a lecture upon their responsibilities. The child is theirs, to educate, to develop, to make a man of ; they must be to him "as a shelter from the wind, and a covert from the tempest," and they must stand for him before God. Thus the verdict of Psychology has gone to the support of the second view, the organic view of the status of the child ; and it is pressing this more and more upon the attention of all religious teachers to-day.

Other causes, of course, have contributed, and still contribute more or less, to the present antagonism of these theories ; but these, so far as I can see, are to a large extent responsible for it. Evangelicalism tends to draw the child out of the family and to treat him as a man. Psychology insists that he must be treated as a child, and puts him back into the shelter of the home again.

It would be a big task to enter upon a history of the rise and progress of individualism in its struggle with the organic conception of the family. The record of their conflict even within the pale of the Christian Church would take long to tell. But two things it specially concerns us to know ; how these two conceptions, so far as the position of the child is concerned, stood related to one another in the Church of the Old Testament ; and in what way, if at all, that relation was altered in the early Christian Church.

Those who are really anxious to discover a true and reliable theory of the religious status of the child will find it necessary to study these two points with care. Modern Psychology may be right, and Christian people are willing to learn of it, but the written record of the revelation of God is their first text-book, and to that they appeal. Modern Evangelicalism may be right, and Christian people long ere this have recognised its worth and thanked God for it; but they cannot allow it to answer all the questions of life, nor can they accept its view of the child as accurate without examining it in the light of the Old Testament and of the New. Such an examination must proceed upon historical lines; one or two isolated proof texts cannot be allowed to decide the matter. The Old Testament position must be studied, for in it is a revelation of God, which albeit an imperfect one foreshadows that which is perfect. The New Testament position must be studied, and the attitude of Jesus toward children and His utterances regarding them, as well as the teaching of His apostles, all carefully weighed. Along these lines I propose to attempt a brief study of the question, so far at least as it concerns the child, in this little book. That being done, I think it will be possible to decide between the two theories mentioned in favour of the latter. In the succeeding chapters some of its practical advantages will be pointed out, as well as its practical bearing upon Christian nurture.

Perhaps it may be well to outline very briefly here what I conceive to be the general teaching of the Old Testament and the New upon the question at issue. In the Jewish Church the individual was merged in the family and in the nation. So strong was the organic conception of the former, that grown-up sons and daughters were not allowed even to question the authority of their father. Isaac, although he was a full-grown man, did not dispute his father's right to slay him ; and Abraham does not seem to have thought it right to take him into his confidence, and to tell him what he was minded to do. So complete was the conception of society as organic that the national prayers in the Psalms, expressive of the adoration and confession of a whole people, are used by us to express the spiritual experience of the individual. In later Judaism, in the post-exilic writers, notably Nehemiah, there is a growing sense of the worth of the individual man ; he is emerging from the nation and preparing himself, as it were, for his emancipation in Christ, but the child still remains a part of the family, under the shelter of his father's faith. This will be granted by all. The question is whether a similar conception of his position prevailed in the Christian Church of the first century. Undoubtedly Christ helped to emancipate the individual. He emphasised the necessity of the personal relation with God. He called the man " out by himself," that He might send him back into the family and the

nation a new man. But what did He and His apostles do with the child? Was he called out by himself too, or was he still regarded whilst a child as represented by his father? Was his former status of religious dependence annulled? I do not think it was. I believe the New Testament, as well as the Old, regards it as one of the axioms of religion, that the promises of God include the child with the parent; and in support of that belief the following pages have been written.

CHAPTER II

THE CHILD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

WE shall now briefly examine the position of the child in the Jewish Church, and endeavour to see what were the most distinctive features of Jewish education. This historical way of approaching the subject should help us to arrive at a clear understanding of the position of the child in the early Christian Church.

The fundamental religious idea of the people of Israel was the idea that as a nation they were in covenant with Jehovah. Upon that foundation the whole structure of their faith was built. Jehovah, their God, had graciously drawn near to them, and had chosen them from among all the families of the earth ; and, on the basis of certain conditions, had entered into an agreement with them for their bodily and spiritual good. It is not easy to determine how this covenant idea originated ; the piety of Israel seems to have taken it for granted, and the only reason assigned for it is the gracious love of Jehovah.

The great covenant wherein Jehovah became God of the nation was sealed at Sinai : but previous to that day He had entered into a

covenant with Abraham, the father of the nation that was to be, and this covenant with the individual foreshadowed the covenant with the nation. The covenant with Abraham was a promise on the part of Jehovah that in Abraham and in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, and it was conditional upon the faith and the conduct of the patriarch; "for I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." The position of the two parties covenanting was utterly unequal; this was clearly recognised; but Jehovah's mercy and love stooped to this relationship, and actually condescended to establish a certain mutual obligation.

Of this covenant with Abraham the national covenant at Sinai was the direct outcome, and the former helps to explain the latter. When Jehovah with a mighty hand brought Israel up out of Egypt, that was the birthday of the nation. There, at Sinai, He made known His will unto Moses, and offered to enter into a covenant with the people on the ground of what He had done. "Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people." And Moses called for the people, "and laid before their faces all these words." And all the people answered together

and said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." "And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord" (Ex. xix.). Henceforth, notwithstanding the sins of the people, this covenant formed the permanent basis of salvation in Israel; and the new covenant which the prophets proclaimed was but a deeper and more spiritual form of the agreement ratified at Sinai.

Into the conditions which this agreement imposed upon the people of Israel I shall not enter. The sum of them was contained in the Ten Commandments; and in later legislation they were expanded to meet all the circumstances of national and individual life. But I wish to point out and to emphasise the fact, that in this covenant the children were included with their parents. It embraced the whole nation, every one who was willing to accept the responsibilities implied, as well as those who by reason of their youth were yet unable consciously to give their assent. The covenant with Abraham included the child of Abraham. The covenant with the nation included the "little ones." They are expressly mentioned as parties to it (Deut. xxix.).

As a member of a covenanted nation the child naturally had a part in a covenant which included all. His responsibilities and privileges he could not realise as yet, but the duty of conveying the latter and of educating in the former devolved upon the head of the family into which he had been born. Each father in

covenanting for himself covenanted also for his children, and circumcision was a sign and seal to him of God's promise that his children were included under the shelter of his faith. In that rite the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob put His name upon them and claimed them for His own.

The devout Jewish father clearly recognised that the great privileges of the covenant entailed responsibilities correspondingly great. If in virtue of his faith his children were members, it was his duty so to educate them that they would grow up members, and would take upon themselves on attaining to manhood the responsibility of full-grown membership. In other words, the position of his children as sons of the covenant, as well as their continuing to be sons of the covenant, depended to a large extent upon him. It devolved upon him by a special system of training to educate them as children of Jehovah. On that condition as he understood it God's promise was made ; on that condition he accepted it, and entered into a compact with God as a fellow-labourer for the salvation of his children.

This belief of the Jewish father issued in a system of religious education, which for earnestness and unity of purpose has never been surpassed, and which has had the effect of keeping a people for hundreds of centuries permanently and enthusiastically devoted to the faith of their fathers.

With each woman in Israel cherishing the precious hope in her heart that she might be the mother of the Messiah, or at least a link in the chain of his ancestry, and with fathers numbering their sons among the special blessings of God, it is not surprising that this nation was rich in children. "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them ; they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." Even the presence of little ones at play in the streets was recognised as a sign of God's favour ; and when, in that dreary time after the Exile, there were no little voices heard shouting in delight, and no little feet speeding along in the joy of play, the prophet of God was sent to comfort His people with the promise that "the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." Rich in children were the Jews ; and they regarded them as part of the true riches, high among God's greatest blessings.

The duty of training these children of the covenant belonged to the parents who had covenanted, and could not be delegated to any stranger however competent. "The words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart ; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." The parents were to be the teachers, for on them the responsibility rested ;

and conversation was to be the primary method of education.

And so until the time when he was six years old the Jewish boy was taught at home, generally by his mother, who, although she gave little attention to the education of her daughters, spared no trouble to familiarise her sons with the revealed will of God. The text-book was the Scriptures, and until the boy was ten years old no other book was used in his education. Timothy, although his father was a Gentile, had been brought up in this nurture, and knew the Scriptures "from a little child." Probably this education began as among ourselves with Bible stories and the repetition of texts from the Scriptures, the first of which to be learned was the famous Shema creed, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." Interesting as Bible stories are to all children, to the Jewish child their interest must have been exceptional, for they were in a peculiar sense his own. They belonged to him and he to them; they were as has been said "part of his own racial epic." They had to do with men of the covenant who were his fathers. In his veins flowed their blood who had dared those deeds and made his nation great. And so "he grew up with the feelings of racial community glowing in his heart, as an incentive and inspiration unparalleled in the religious education of any other child."

Some of these stories, notably the most precious of all, the story of the national deliverance,

were further imprinted upon the child's mind by object-lessons. Indeed each feast was an object-lesson in religion, and each had its enthralling interest for the child. In the rules for the observance of the Passover prescribed by the Mosaic legislation he had his place. He was encouraged to ask what was the meaning of the ordinance, and every endeavour was made to stimulate his interest ; while the satisfying of it by recounting the events of that night was a part of the ordinance itself. The youngest child of the house who was able to speak had thus an honoured part in the observance of this family feast, and through him all the children were made to feel partakers in that great deliverance.

When he was six years old the boy was sent to the school, the " House of the Book " as it was called. After the Exile it usually met in the synagogue, or in a room attached to it. Here the pupils were ranged in a circle round the teacher, sitting when he sat, and standing when he stood ; for one of the first principles of education in the Jewish mind, and it was carried out most literally, was that the teacher must put himself on a level with his pupils.

The regular course of Bible study began with the first seven chapters of the Book of Leviticus, that in them the child might early become familiar with the outward ceremonial acts of the Law. Then the Pentateuch was studied ; then the Prophets ; and then the remaining Books of the Old Testament. Such a course furnished

not only an intelligent conception of God's Law, but also, as nearly as possible, a complete manual of conduct. Reading, writing and grammar were taught, and a little arithmetic; but this must have been after a rather limited fashion, for the one and the only text-book was the Scriptures, and nothing was deemed worth learning unless it illustrated, or was illustrated by, the Word of God. Such teaching at the school did not relieve the father of his responsibility to teach his son. Every other engagement, says Ederheim, had to give place to this daily duty. From his father the boy must receive his first impressions of God, and from him he must learn what God had done and what God required him to do. Other teachers might co-operate with the father in his great work, but the responsibility never left his door.

On reaching his thirteenth year the Jewish boy attained his religious majority. Thereupon he was examined as to his knowledge of the duties and privileges to which, when a baby of a week old, he had been admitted by the rite of circumcision. Having passed the test he took upon himself freely and intelligently the yoke of the Law, and by it he was henceforth bound.

On the first Sabbath after his coming of age the boy had a share in the service of the synagogue, reading a portion of the Law. If a bright boy he had possibly already been permitted to read there in public a short lesson from the Prophets, a privilege which was not infrequently given.

Indeed, the honourable position of the Jewish child in the Church is nowhere more plainly to be seen than in this picture of a little child taking a leading part in the public worship of God. When the boy read the Law publicly for the first time he entered into the religious responsibility of manhood and was known as a son of the Law.

From this brief account it can be clearly seen of what great importance in Jewish eyes was the education of children ; and however narrowing the system may have proved in some of its practical results, we cannot but admire that passionate desire of all worthy of the name of parents, that their children should know God ; " The fear of the Lord that is wisdom." Jewish education was essentially religious education : its purpose was to make men competent to do the will of God as it had been revealed ; and its watchword was *salvation through education*.

One thing this purpose and the manner of its fulfilment makes clear, that the Jew did not look upon his children as spiritually incapable. They were members of the covenant by their fathers' faith, it is true, not by their own ; but they were not, except in unconscious infancy, incapable of responding to spiritual influences. They had religious capacity, limited of course, but capable of being drawn out. They could be educated in the faith into a practical knowledge of God. Their hearts were not deemed totally black, their natures totally depraved. Had this been so religious education would have

been an impossibility, and God's covenant, so far as it included children, an absurdity. His children belonged to God, and it was God's will that they should always belong to Him in strengthening bonds of love; such was the Jewish father's faith, such the inspiration of his practice.

Another thing which this method of education discloses is the strong belief in the organic unity of the family which existed among the Jews. The child did not stand alone even before God. His father stood with him, and was his representative. He was a son of the covenant, because he was a member of a covenanted house. He remained a son of the covenant unless he refused to enter into its responsibilities when they came by turning his back upon the teaching and the faith in which he had been nurtured. Unless the promise of God were of no consequence, unless his prayers were wasted breath, unless his, and his father's, and his father's father's faith in God to many generations contributed nothing to the position of the child, the Jewish father could not believe anything else.

A child of prayer, a child of believing parents, a child of promise, must stand in a different relation to God from a child of the Edomites, such was the implication of the covenant; and that being so, the Jew was confident that the religious education of his child faithfully carried out would issue in a religious man.

As to the manner and methods of education

employed in home and at school, two things are worthy of attention and imitation ; the concreteness of the teaching, and the natural way in which it was imparted. God's method of teaching men in the Old Testament, like our Lord's method in the New Testament, was concrete. He pressed the truth home by experience, line upon line, precept upon precept, throughout the vicissitudes of His people's history. He taught them to recognise Him behind the events of the past, that they might know Him in the present, and trust Him for the future.

Jehovah's great purpose of grace was to be seen in the story of Abraham, His patience in His dealings with Jacob, His faithfulness in His guidance of Joseph, His power in the deliverance from Egypt, His hatred of sin in the lonely death of Moses, His holiness in the awful darkness of Sinai. Every doctrine was hidden behind a story, that "truth embodied in a tale might enter in at lowly doors."

And such teaching was natural and open ; "Thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." There was no awkward restraint ; no changed tone to be detected in the mother's voice, no strained look upon the father's face when religion was mentioned ; no feeling that what was being said was being said at a distance, across the table so to speak. In the home, in the world, in history and in nature, everywhere

were signs of God's presence, and it was only natural to point them out. When the family were sitting in the house, the door posts and the lintels could be used as teachers ; when walking by the way, the heavens and the firmament took up the wondrous tale ; when lying down, He who slumbered not nor slept drew near to guard ; and when rising up, He tarried to listen to the voice of thanksgiving and praise. And so that wonderful sense of God possessed by the Hebrews, of God in life permeating it through and through, was nourished and developed and handed on from one generation to another, and their family and national life and history were bound everywhere by gold chains about the feet of the Eternal.

CHAPTER III

THE CHILD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

KEEPING clearly in view the status of children in the Jewish Church we shall now proceed to determine what place was assigned to them in the Christian community by Christ and His apostles. They were Jews, and in Jewish nurture they had been brought up. As a member of a covenanted family Jesus lived in His home in Nazareth until He was twelve years old. There, subject to His parents, He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. The organic unity of the family was a familiar conception to the men who were pioneers of Christianity. They regarded the belief as divinely sanctioned that the head of the house stood before God for his child. This fact, so obvious and so simple, must be borne in mind by those who would interpret the New Testament references to children. The question is not what impression do they convey to us now with our theological preferences, but what impression did they convey from those who first made them to those who first heard them. Undoubtedly the writers of the New

Testament held by virtue of their early training very decided views upon the relation of a child whose father was a man of faith to his father's God, upon the spiritual susceptibility of the child, and upon the possibility of his salvation by education. The point to be determined is how far those views were carried over into Christianity, and how far the child's position in virtue of his father's faith was altered when his father welcomed Jesus as the Messiah.

The first thing that strikes the seeker is the rarity of references to children in the New Testament writings. It is probable that very little thought was expended upon their condition just then, when their seniors were so enthralled with the new faith; and probable, too, that the assumption was in all minds that they would continue to stand as they had done in the past. In collecting our evidence we must not make the mistake of applying to children words of Christ and of His disciples which were addressed to full-grown men. We must not for example suppose that our Lord's attitude to children can be determined by His words to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again"; or that Paul's attitude is settled by a quotation from his Epistle to the Romans on the studied depravity of the Gentiles. Such verses have not a direct bearing upon the subject. They are not addressed to children, much less to children of the covenant.

Christ's view of the spiritual condition of

children may be deduced from several significant utterances of His, and from one very significant action. The classic passage, which describes the latter and tells how He received some children brought to Him by their mothers for His blessing, is a sacred spot for every Christian parent. The incident is recorded by three of the evangelists, and Luke says that the children were babes. When the disciples, resenting the interruption of their own converse on high and important subjects, rebuked those who brought them, Jesus was greatly displeased—the only occasion on which this strong expression is used of our Lord—and said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.” “And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them.” These words and this action I have no desire to press. Any one can feel that they are full of significance. So far from suggesting that the position of the child is now to be curtailed and his privileges diminished, the impression they make is that he is to have a place in the new kingdom, and that somewhere near to the heart of it. The attempt to explain away the words “of such is the kingdom of God,” by applying them to grown-up people only, must be stoutly resisted. I do not deny that the words may carry the meaning that the kingdom consists of such as are childlike; but that is not their primary meaning. “Let little children come to Me, for of grown-up people

who are childlike is the kingdom of Heaven"—so translated, the second clause, introduced by *for*, assigns no intelligent reason for the invitation of the first clause. "Let little children come to Me, for of such little children is the kingdom," is a rendering absolutely necessary to give the conjunction, and indeed the action of Christ, any real significance. "It is beyond all doubt," says Calvin, "that the word 'such' designates both infants themselves and those who resemble them." It cannot be seriously suggested that Jesus meant to imply that only grown-up people who became like little ones were members of His kingdom; and that those children sitting on His knee or gathered about His feet were outside it, because they were too young. He spoke of them as belonging to His kingdom, although some of them were babes; He treated them as belonging to it, for He took them up in His arms, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them. These last words have a deliberateness about them that gives us the impression of a very deliberate action, and the term for blessing in Mark's account of the narrative is a compound word, with an intensive force. What precisely Jesus meant by saying that they belonged to His kingdom we shall try to see later on; but unless the act and the word are to be emptied of all meaning and become a pious fiction merely, we must assume that our Lord did not regard these children as spiritually incapable, but that He looked upon them as possessing at least

sufficient spiritual capacity to receive blessing from God. The impression of the incident may be summed up thus ; Jesus regarded these little children as belonging to His kingdom, and susceptible to spiritual influences ; more susceptible indeed than older people because of their youth.

On another occasion Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of His disciples, and taking him as a text said, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God." What idea is behind that utterance ? What is the implication ? Is it not that children, by reason of their youth, are nearer in heart to the spirit of the kingdom ? Or, are we to hold that our Lord exhorted men to turn and to become like children and they would enter the kingdom, whilst at the same time He held that children themselves were too young to have any part or lot therein ?

On another occasion, when warning men most earnestly against the crime of causing a child to stumble, He said that in heaven the angels of the children stood nearest God's throne, always beholding the Father's face. Theirs was the first right of entry into His presence. An interpretation of the verse would raise the whole subject of Jewish angelology, and would draw us away from our path. But, however imaginative an explanation one may put upon the words, this is plainly their teaching, that children, so far from being overlooked by God

because they are small, are remembered because they are small ; that the little child's prayer is first attended to, the little child's need first supplied, and the little child's feet most tenderly guided. Reading these three accounts of Christ's references to children, would any one naturally conclude that He looked upon them as aliens from God, who needed to grow up and be converted ? Would any one suppose that their Jewish privileges were curtailed ? Is not this the impression made by the words, that children are specially dear to God and specially near to God because of their youth ? " It is most evident," says Calvin, " that the covenant the Lord once made with Abraham continues as much in force with Christians in the present day as it did formerly with the Jews, unless we suppose that Christ by His advent diminished or curtailed the grace of the Father, which is execrable blasphemy."

References to children in the Acts of the Apostles are very few. Such questions as the attitude of the Church towards the Gentiles absorbed most of the thought of the apostles ; and there seems to have been no suspicion that the place which the child had occupied under the old covenant was to be changed now. One brief but very important reference occurs in Peter's first sermon : " To you is the promise, and to your children " (Acts ii. 39). To determine the implication of these words we have simply to ask what meaning they would convey

to the Jewish audience who heard them. In all probability they would be understood to mean that children were to occupy under the new covenant a place similar to that which they occupied under the old. In the one as in the other the father would include the child. Spoken by a Jew to Jews familiar with the position declared therein, they could scarcely mean anything else. In the first Christian sermon then it seems to be taken for granted that the child stands as of old under his father's faith.

In the later writings of Paul we find a slightly different condition of things, a condition more like our own. The men and women whom he had shepherded in from heathendom married and had children. Many of them had been Jews, trained and nurtured in the belief that a father's faith set his child, while yet a child, in a special relationship to God ; there is not a word from the apostle suggesting that a change in that belief is necessary, whilst there are several statements tending to support and encourage it.

In one passage he says distinctly that children born to Christian parents are holy. This does not mean that they are inwardly personally holy, for the use of the word sanctify in the passage proves that the terms have their ceremonial significance. But it evidently does mean that they are in a different relationship to God from the children of unbelievers ; that in fact they are consecrated to God, in a special degree His own, His peculiar possession. If but one

parent believes, that faith carries the position of the child with it, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." This is the very language of the old covenant, these are its identical terms. Read apart from the Jewish conception of childhood the passage is unintelligible, read in the light of it no difficulty whatever is presented.

Again, as has often been pointed out, Paul in his Epistles expressly includes children in the membership of the Christian Church, and that although they were such little children as still to require nurture. His Epistle to the Ephesians is addressed to "the saints which are in Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus," and among these saints children are included; for, dividing them into classes, he says to one class, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." The Epistle to the Colossians is inscribed in a similar manner, and among these saints also children are addressed, and told to obey their parents in all things. They were still little children, for their fathers are charged with their up-bringing, and yet they are addressed as genuine Church members, in fact as Christians.

But another argument, and one of very great weight in determining whether there was a change of attitude towards children in the Church of the apostles, is to be found in the practice of household baptism. The references to it will

be treated more fully in the seventh chapter, but at this stage of the argument it will be useful to notice them. Three examples are recorded of what is known as household baptism. The case of Lydia is well known. Of her it is written that her heart was opened, and she believed and was baptized, and her household. Whatever meaning the words may convey to us, there was one meaning they would certainly convey to those familiar with the Jewish position, namely that the head of the house having become a Christian had carried over her household with her. The faith of the head was a guarantee for the whole house.

The case of the Philippian jailer is similar. On the night of his conversion, straightway, after the apostles had spoken to him the word of the Lord, he was baptized, he and all his. Now the record does not say that any one believed but himself. The participle in the original is singular, not plural, "and he believing in God rejoiced, with all his house." He believed, they all rejoiced, and they were all baptized together; that is the author's statement. Its meaning could not be mistaken by any one who was acquainted with the Jewish practice. When the jailer became a Christian he carried his household with him.

The third case is that of Stephanas; and, although we know nothing of him or his, the mere mention of him fortifies our argument. Paul baptized "the household of Stephanas,"

in other words he practised household baptism. The words naturally mean that he baptized the household on the faith of its head.

To give to the argument the full force of these three instances it is not necessary to believe that there were children in any of these households. We do not know that there were. It is unlikely that there were not, and more unlikely that if there were, and if Paul did not believe in household baptism, he would have used this expression. No one who is familiar with the attitude of the Old Testament Church to the child, and who is also familiar with the additional fact that proselytes to the Jewish faith were baptized, and their households, can deny that the natural interpretation to be put upon these instances is that baptism went by households, that "when the head of the house became a Christian, his baptism carried with it the presumptive faith and consequently the baptism of all."

It may be said that these New Testament references are very few, some of them very indefinite, and all of them together quite insufficient to carry the weight of our position; but as a matter of fact their fewness does not in any way limit the force of our contention. We should have expected many and very express references to children in the New Testament only if their status had undergone a radical change; but if the same position was to be theirs under the new covenant as had been theirs

under the old, there was no reason why there should be frequent references to them at all. All the references that do exist are perfectly in line with the contention that their status remained practically unchanged. There is not one that will suggest a change, nor one that will even present a difficulty, if we are prepared to read the New Testament in the light of the Old, and if we try to ascertain what was in the speaker's mind when he spoke, and what impression he meant to leave upon the minds of his audience.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW TESTAMENT POSITION EXPANDED

BUT when it is admitted that nothing in the New Testament can be so construed as to deprive the children of believing parents of that great privilege which they enjoyed in the Jewish Church, many questions present themselves to the mind for solution. Among the first is this. If the Gospel was so different from the Law, its demand so much more spiritual and more penetrating; if it carried with it such new conditions of life for the parent, did it not also carry with it new conditions of life for the child? Christianity is not simply an expansion of Judaism, it has a new and distinct spirit of its own. God draws nearer to men in the Gospel, and deals with them at first hand; and gives them not laws, but the principle and the power of a new life. The mechanical nature of the Old Testament ritual is transfused at Christ's touch. Did not *salvation by education* partake of that nature, and was it not done away by the new spirit of the Gospel? If Nicodemus, a son of the covenant, probably a faithful and zealous member of it, needed to be born from

above, a similar change would probably be necessary for Nicodemus' child. He too would require to be quickened by the inbreathing of the life of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." Are we not compelled by the whole spirit of Christianity so to reason, and consequently to conclude that the Jewish principle of *salvation by education* was defective?

Undoubtedly we are. Whilst not admitting that a principle which claimed to possess divine sanction was wrong, whilst maintaining that Jesus' view of the position of the child did not point to his deprivation, we cannot but feel that *salvation by education*, as practised by the Jews, was defective. It did not lay sufficient stress upon the operation of the Spirit of God: nor did it adequately recognise that the source of spiritual life is in Him. It laid the emphasis too much upon man's share in that education, and too little upon God's share. It exalted the human part in the covenant, and neglected the divine part. The Jewish father proceeded as though upon the assumption that God could only act upon his child mediately through him, forgetting that God could also act upon his child, however young, immediately, and even independently of him altogether. It was the direct personal touch of God upon the soul conscious or unconscious that Jesus emphasised, in distinction from the mechanical and legalistic

piety of Judaism. A parent may foster the spiritual life, but God must plant it.

Christianity did not say to the Jewish father, "Your principle of salvation by education is all wrong, your hopes and practice are alike worthless." It did not say, "Your child is an outsider from Christ's kingdom on account of his youth and his inheritance of guilt." No, it said, "He is a member in the becoming; to grow up into membership he needs your training, but he needs more, he needs the quickening life of God. That may come to him through your training, or it may come directly. It may come early in life before he is conscious of it, or it may come later. It may come gradually without observation, but come it must, and to co-operate in its coming, and be an instrument of its coming, should be the first aim of every Christian parent." On the one hand Christianity warns the parent against the assumption that he himself can educate his child unto salvation. Salvation includes life and power, which God alone can give. On the other hand it warns him against the assumption that the Spirit of God is limited by a person's age, and that God is unable to quicken a child because he is young; and also against the supposition that God needs no human aid, and that the divine life is less divine when it is mediated through a father or a mother.

Salvation by education is right when it is remembered that God the life-Giver is the great Educator, and that the parents must co-operate

with Him, rather than He with the parents. So Christianity did add something new to the Jewish conception of the child. It added that feature which has ever been its characteristic, the power of the living God in the regeneration of men.

Another question arises here, the full treatment of which must be postponed to the chapter on the doctrinal issues. Can very young children in any true sense be recipients of the life of God? The reason why this presents itself as a difficulty is because we have grown accustomed to connect the receiving of this life with the conscious response of the soul to it, and because we confound the coming of the new life with the soul's realisation of it. But the two are not to be confused, and it is often very helpful to discriminate between them. The greater number of the Christians whom I have known intimately could not say when that new life first came to them: it seemed to them when they looked back as though they had gradually awakened to the fact that it was there. The realisation of God in Christ grew upon them: they discovered that He had been with them, and in them; and they awoke to know it. In the experience of the first disciples something like this seems to have taken place. Peter and James and John stole gradually into the fulness of the kingdom. When the new life came to them we do not know, the probability is they did not know: theirs was not a cataclysmic change. Paul's was;

but Paul's experience was exceptional, and theirs normal, a fact which evangelicalism has often overlooked. If the majority of the apostles passed into the kingdom gradually, and almost unconsciously, surely it is not impossible for children to enter by the same door. Their youth cannot make it impossible : Jeremiah was sanctified before he was born ; Samuel received the quickening life very early. So did John the Baptist ; so it appears did Timothy. The life was there before it was conscious ; and the response, the gradual awakening, came afterwards because the life was there. It cannot be impossible now, unless God's grace is limited by a person's age.

It is from this point of view, I think, that we should regard those spiritual crises that mark the life of all children of God ; those times when they awaken to a conscious realisation of His love, to their dependence upon Him, and to His call upon their services. Peter had such an experience at Cæsarea Philippi, and again at the lake side when Christ gave him his pardon and his commission. Many Sunday-school teachers and parents can testify to having watched such awakenings in those under their charge, and many can testify to having experienced them themselves. They connect them with a day when their father spoke personally to them of the love of God, and encouraged them to respond to it ; or when their teacher laid his hand upon their shoulder, and told them

that God expected more of them now. Or perhaps some sudden temptation had surprised them, and they ran to Christ in real need ; or some sorrow had engulfed them, and they lifted their eyes to God, and felt His arm about them. Or maybe it was by the fireside, when their mother was reading a Bible story ; and in a moment all the figures save One disappeared from the scene—Scribes, Pharisees, and peasants ; and there was no one there but Him, and His winged words came straight to their ears and entered their hearts, and they knew that they were indeed dedicated spirits.

The wind of the Spirit bloweth where it listeth. The operations of the grace of God are not absent because they are not seen, or because there is no immediate or conscious response to them. His life He can give to all ; and the teaching of Christ invariably leaves the impression that He can give it more easily to the child because he is a child.

But another question urges itself upon our attention ; and, although it is one of very great difficulty, I feel I must face it, and endeavour at least to suggest a solution. It arises from a difficulty in realising the content of the term kingdom. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of children as belonging to the kingdom ? Did He mean that they were Christians, or did He not ? If He did, then is it possible to be a Christian without a conscious allegiance to Christ ? And if He did not, then what advan-

tage more than others did they possess from belonging to His kingdom? The question is really one of terms. Without attempting a scientific definition of this term, which it is almost impossible to define, one may affirm that the kingdom of God is a wider term than Christian. It embraces all goodness everywhere, all that makes for righteousness and truth, all that consciously or unconsciously is upon the side of God in the amelioration of the world. It denotes a state not of being but of becoming; and those who are members of it are in a state of becoming rather than of attainment. Our Lord Himself recognised grades in the kingdom, for He spoke of those who are least in the kingdom of God. To be in the kingdom is to be a subject of God, not against Him, but on His side. In the case of those who are yet unconscious agents, to be a member of the kingdom means to be a child of God in the bud, with the possibility of the flower opening out into bloom under the proper conditions of atmosphere and of culture. The kingdom is the world with God in it, operating in it freely and generously, ministering His life and His salvation through mankind to mankind.

When a true conception of the kingdom is grasped, the question whether Christ meant that these children were Christians can hardly arise, and if it does the answer is simply this, they are Christians in the becoming. The natural course for them, with proper training, will be an ad-

vance into the kingdom ;—the natural course because no actual transgression excludes them, nor any inherited guilt, and because their very youthfulness makes them more susceptible to God's grace. If any still press for an answer, insisting upon a yes or no, one can only shelter one's self behind the terms used by Christ. He speaks of children as belonging to His kingdom. They are not full members, but members they are ; possibly the least in the kingdom of God, but at any rate in it. What I contend for in these chapters is that this position, which He has given them, should be recognised as of some worth, and acted upon in our Christian training.

But yet another question is raised, and perhaps it is the most difficult of all. Many readers of His great defence of the children whom our Lord blessed have the feeling that what He said of them He said, not because they were Jews, but simply because they were children. There is a wide imperial ring about the words which some of His utterances possess. We may suppose, if we choose, that those children whom He blessed were all Jews ; and yet we cannot but feel that, had their nationality been different, Christ would probably have said the same of them. Simply on the score of their infancy He welcomed them to His heart and called them His. In doing so He was doing more than giving His sanction to a Jewish belief, He was expounding a world-wide gospel. He was not

denying the probability of salvation for the Jewish child, He was emphasising the possibility of salvation for the child of the Gentile. The impression is irresistible, that Christ here claims every child born into the world as a possible son, for whose soul God purposes mercy and grace and salvation.

But what becomes then of the difference between the child who is born of Christian parents and the child who is not? Are they, after all, upon the same footing? In spite of the father's prayers and the forefathers' faith, is the latter in the same position as the former? Is what has been contended for in these chapters of no spiritual value whatever?

A little reflection and a careful use of terms will soon make it clear that it is not so. In calling children as children members of His kingdom, Jesus, as I have said, used the term in its wide sense. He spoke of them as all possible sons, who, from their very weakness, were in a condition of susceptibility to God's grace. All children are that. But the children of believing parents have not therefore lost their special privileges. Their parents' faith and consequent covenant with God render a possibility a probability, nay, an actuality. God meets their parents with His special promise, because He finds in them helpers, co-operators to minister His life to their children, to be His channels in conveying His grace. What is almost certainly impossible to a child of Timbuctoo, is more than

possible to the child of believing parents. These come forward and accept the conditions on which their children's membership in the kingdom is assured, for the present and for the future too ; they claim and they appropriate membership for their children. As Christian sonship does not become true sonship unless it is appropriated, so the believing father appropriates this sonship for his child, and with it the assurance that his child, now a member in the becoming, will be a member in actuality, in very deed and truth. He ratifies his membership with God, and it is sealed to him by the promises. Were the same ratification made by the parent in Timbuctoo, the same assurance would be given and received : it is not ; but Christ's words make it plain, and our hearts may well rejoice in it, that the fault is not God's but man's. Those lambs also He would fain gather in His arms and carry in His bosom, were there any to reach them up to Him.

It will be noticed that this position supposes a difference between the terms kingdom and Church, whereas in the Confession of Faith they seem to be used as convertible. Difficult as it is to define either term, or to set its limits, it can hardly be questioned that the kingdom is wider than the Church, wider even than the Church visible, the only Church which, strictly speaking, is known to New Testament writers. For example, one of the most evident facts of our own day is that many who are members of

the kingdom decline to become full members of the Church. The Church is a kingdom within the kingdom. Now, if the assertion of the Confession that children of believing parents are members of the Church means that they belong to the kingdom and nothing more, we go further than that, as we think the New Testament warrants us in doing. Using the word Church in its inmost and New Testament sense, we believe that they are Church members whose kingdom membership has been changed into Church membership by the ratification of their parents. Their membership is a real thing, not a fiction ; it is actual, not prospective only. Others in the Church have advanced to a far richer and fuller membership than theirs, and though the difference may seem a difference of kind it is only a difference of degree. The child is as truly, though not as fully, a Church member as his believing father, and both are members in the becoming.

On the other hand we have been impelled, by what seems to be the teaching of Christ, to affirm that all children belong as children to Christ's kingdom. By this we mean that, having been born into a world for which Christ died, and their original guilt having been annulled, and no deliberate sin against God lying to their account, they are among those who have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ. A mere nominal thing this membership may seem, yet if it has been given them by Christ it cannot be

altogether an empty title. At least it serves to allay dark and troublesome questions about what may happen should they die in infancy ; it reveals to us the purpose of God's grace stretching out far more widely than our hearts have dreamed ; and it summons us most imperatively to go to His aid in bringing them into the inner heart and life of the kingdom, to the Church of God, where His will for them may be abundantly realised.

There are few readers of the New Testament who do not feel how far above and out of their grasp is Christ's great doctrine of the kingdom of God, how infinitely wider in the expansion of its horizon than anything which they have been able to conceive. Yet sometimes we have hints and suggestions of it, and when they come and make their impression on our minds we strive to grasp our share of their great beauty, and we struggle with words to set forth those glimpses of God's mercy which we have seen and felt.

CHAPTER V

RIVAL THEORIES CONTRASTED

OUR study has thus led us to conclude that salvation by education, God being recognised as the great Teacher, is the proper Christian nurture; and that the children of believing parents have through the faith of the latter a place in the Church, and a part with Christ.

So far from being regarded as spiritually incapable because of their youth, or as exiles from grace because of original sin and guilt, they are to be looked upon as children of God in the becoming; and the object of their training is to make His presence and His saving power conscious realities in their growing lives. The parent has not to wait for their religious consciousness to awaken before he can be sure they belong to God, and are His children in very deed. When he offers his new-born child to God in prayer, he believes it is accepted then; and he has the confidence that God the Heavenly Father, like himself, is planning grace for its soul. It is His for life, unless by its own deliberate act it repudiates the covenant and

despises its birthright, declining either to enter upon the larger privileges, or to assume the larger responsibilities.

To feel the beauty and the practical worth of a position like this we cannot do better than place beside it the other conceptions which obtain in some quarters to-day, to which reference was made in the first chapter.

To one of these has been given the name agnostic. Because it does not find such clear and definite statements as it asks, setting forth in black and white the position of the child, and because so many different views are preached and taught, it assumes that nothing is known or can be known.

The fatal weakness of this position is that, having no ideal, it has no incentive. The child may be the object of God's grace or he may not ; he may be capable of being trained for Him, or he may not ; nobody knows. Because there is no expectation or hope, neither is there any serious endeavour. The child's training is not directed by a steadfast purpose ; he is treated now as a Christian, and now as a heathen. Every wind that sweeps over the parents' sails is reflected upon his, and he is carried now this way and now that according as it may come. The father sees no incentive in his fatherhood to a purer and better Christian life for himself, he does not grasp the idea of co-operation with God, he does not know that through a nobler life in him God can mediate a nobler life to his

child. There the child lies in all his helplessness, and nothing can be done because nothing is known. He grows up in a world for which Christ's propitiation has not availed, and in which God's grace is fettered and bound by age limits. As the father looks forward he is confronted with fears. The child may turn out well or he may not ; he has no guarantee. The child may die ; he can only hope. For grown-up men and women there can be some confident assurance one way or other, for a child there can be none. The Gospel for a child is a great note of interrogation. Among all the evils attached to such an agnostic position this is the greatest, that at the most plastic period of life, when children are most susceptible to God's grace, nothing is done for them. They are allowed to grow as they may, and when years of discretion come the course of their life is already determined. If they go wrong it can only be piously said that it was "willed" so ; which is just a polite way of saying that fate did it, and did it because God did not care. ■■

Even more pathetic than the position of agnosticism is that other, which in the name of the Gospel looks upon all children alike as the natural enemies of God. The baneful shadow of that conception has cast itself over many Christian homes and Sunday schools. It starts out from the assumption that there is but one door into God's favour, a radical, cataclysmic, self-conscious, deliberate conversion, with all

its full-grown experiences ; and that every individual, whether young or old, a child in a Christian home or an experienced hardened sinner, must come in by that door and partake of all those experiences. The Gospel, the good news for a Christian man's child, say of three or four years, is what ? That he is outside because he is too young. Christ had a message for the experienced sinner and for the outcast, for all grown ups, no matter how bad ; but for these little ones there is no word. They are yet incapable of repentance ; they are too young. To put it plainly, a sixth of the population of the world have no part in Christ or in a work of redemption which included all. If any message is doled out to them at all it is something like this ; you cannot please God, you can do nothing until God gives you a new heart ; and for that you will probably have to wait until you come to years of discretion. You are bad, and you must grow up before you can be good. And this is the message for the Christian parent ; your child is a sinner, and nothing can be done until he is older. If he dies he will perhaps go to heaven. (Though on what grounds that concession is made it is difficult to see, for if he is good enough for heaven if he were dead, he is surely good enough for the kingdom of heaven while living.) You may pray for him of course, and your prayers may be answered some day, but you must not delude yourself into the belief that your faith

at all affects his relationship to God ; it was only under the Old Testament dispensation that the child was allowed to shelter under the parent's wing. You must not call your child a child of God until he is old enough to understand the plan of salvation, and to accept Jesus as his personal Saviour. And so parents and children too are made to feel that it does not much matter how the child grows up, that in fact God has no use for him until he sins and repents. Could any teaching be more unlike a Gospel, or any practice more unchristian ? Many a child brought up like Mark Rutherford in a godly Christian home could say bitterly with him, " Nothing particular happened me until I was about fourteen, when I was told it was time I got converted." I myself have known of children whose parents, professedly and I believe truly Christian, have refrained from correcting their sinful pleasures on the ground that they would wait a year or two, until they were old enough to be converted.

One result of this, and that a most pernicious, is that such parents are shifting the duty of " converting " their children more and more from their own shoulders. They are deputing others to do it, often people who are known neither to them, nor to their children. Professor Henry Drummond has referred to the fact in his record of evangelistic work. He was regularly receiving letters from parents to the effect that they were forwarding their children to him to be

converted; and he points out the confusion which must have been felt in the children's hearts as they came, and the darkness in the parents' hearts when they sent them.

It is but rarely that such children fall into hands as wise and tender as Professor Drummond's. Sometimes the appeal is made to a complete stranger of any denomination or of none, who happens to be in the neighbourhood. A teacher of secular subjects must be chosen with care, so must a physician for the body, but any physician is good enough for the child's soul.

Thus a great number of parents who believe that nothing can be done until their children reach a certain age, will themselves do nothing when that age is attained. They do not like to touch upon a subject which has been studiously avoided hitherto. It is unpleasant. An outsider must do it; and so if any spiritual life comes it will come apart from the home, apart from the parent, and often apart from the Church. It is not to be wondered at, that if the child is cast out of the home or out of the Church to be converted, he will never come back. If he is forced to meet Christ outside, outside he will stay. His Church has no claim upon him, nor have his parents.

It is extremely probable that to this conception of the spiritual state of the child, more than to any other cause, we owe the degeneracy of family religion in the professedly Christian

homes of the present day. What incentive have Christian parents to create a spiritual atmosphere for the members of their family, to nurture them in the Word of God, to pray with them and for them, unless they can feel that in these efforts God is not standing aloof, but is beside them, ministering His life and salvation to them and their children? If, do what they can, pray as they can, teach as they can, still for all that the child has got to be converted afterwards in the so-called ordinary way, then a little neglect will not make any serious difference. If religion is to be restored to the home, obligation must be restored to the parents. They must see that the spiritual development of their child depends on them, that they are his guardians before God. They must realise that Christ, living in them, can make Himself apparent to their child from his earliest years. The Church must say to them, these souls are yours under God, to make or to mar. He has committed them into your care. No matter how young they are, now is their accepted time, now is their day of salvation; your Christian home is the likeliest place in the world for your children to come to know God, and if they do not find Him there through you and in you, and if the fault is your carelessness and your neglect, their blood will be upon your heads.

But perhaps a practical difficulty has presented itself to the mind, suggested by the facts of observation. Many good parents seem to have

had rather indifferent children. How can this happen, if our theory be true?

In meeting this difficulty it may be said, first, that such instances are not so common as they appear; being all noticed and talked about, they seem to be much more numerous than they really are. Besides, very many good people have brought up their children as outsiders, and have perplexed and alienated them thereby. Furthermore, many good people are very indifferent and disagreeable parents, and appear a great deal pleasanter in public than in their own homes. And besides, other influences may and sometimes do prove stronger than the home influences, and springing up choke the Word. But taking everything into consideration, the fact remains that the majority of Christian people in Christendom to-day have come out of good homes; they far exceed both in number and in service those who have been saved by a cataclysmic change. Our principle does not bind us to believe that every child can be made to grow up in Christian faith and love, any more than we are compelled to believe that every convert must develop into perfect sainthood; but it determines for us the true aim and the true ideal by which to guide our teaching and our training.

Christian parents should not hesitate to receive the encouragement and the great hope which such a conception is meant to give them. If, while they were yet little ones, there was no

place for our children in Christ ; if they could not belong to Him until they had reached a certain age ; if, despite our prayers and our training, they had first to grow up in sin, and then be converted by the same experience as the man who has steeped his soul in evil ; if such were the case, why should we care about the early years of training ; or if there were no promise, and all were unknown, why should we do aught but trust to luck ?

But, if these children of ours are Christ's children too, members of His kingdom whose membership has been ratified by our faith ; if year by year it is possible for us to lead them to a realisation, and yet a fuller realisation of the God who loves them, and who has claimed them as His ; if it is God's will, as it is ours, that their feet should be kept from the mire, and that they should never be soiled with the sin that has marred the lives of thousands, shall we not be stimulated to do our very best, that our children now Christ's may be His evermore, some day in a conscious union of heart to heart, with a Christian experience growing fuller and richer, unhaunted by any ghosts from out an evil past ?

Over our Christian homes let us write these words, and let teaching and training and atmosphere and every influence combine to make them true, " Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not." There is a way to make Christians of our children, a glorious way full of hope, because filled with the promise and the

help of God. It demands of us two things that will cost much—to be Christians ourselves, and to live as God's fellow-workers in their training. The question is, are we ready to pay the price?

CHAPTER VI

DOCTRINAL ISSUES

AN attempt must now be made to face the doctrinal issues, to see whether this view of the status of the child is in agreement with the long-established fundamental doctrines of the Protestant faith, and whether differences might not disappear were a restatement of the latter attempted. That these do need restatement and modification many people feel, and it is well to be perfectly candid in treating the subject.

The doctrines of original sin and original guilt have first to be reckoned with. "By their sin our first parents became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation." How does our theory fare in the face of that? But how does any theory fare? How does the Confession theory fare in face of that? Are those children whom it calls Church

members totally depraved? If so, ought they, being in such a state, to be baptized? Is the difference between them and other children a verbal difference only, and on the strength of a verbal difference does the Church open the Sacrament of baptism to some, and close it against others? If they are not totally depraved, what then becomes of this section? Whatever theory one holds on the status of the child presents dogmatic difficulties, and suggests a modification of some doctrinal statements.

There are several interpretations of doctrine and of life in our day which suggest a modification of the doctrine of original guilt. Dr. A. M. Fairbairn claims that it is not a Pauline doctrine. He goes carefully into the words used by the apostle, and concludes that "Adam creates no man save himself a transgressor or offender, though he creates all men sinners. The act of Adam creates for man a state of privation, loss, evil, which are all summed up in the term death; but he does not create one of guilt." Many theologians have accepted this position; they no longer saddle the child with the burden of original guilt; they no longer hold that he is responsible to God for sins not committed by himself, for which, even if he does not live to be a conscious wilful sinner, he may be condemned eternally.

The scientific statements of man's physical origin have also contributed somewhat to this

modification, the physical evolution of man being now accepted as a scientific fact. Whilst many of the early positions of the doctrine of evolution have been modified, its general conclusions have been regarded as established, and theology has accepted it as true that man is the crown of a great evolutionary process. This has led us to look with other eyes upon many of those things once called "sins" in the child. That selfishness in the satisfaction of his appetites, and that resentment against control, and those storms of passion we see as clearly as ever we did, but we call them by other names. We still use the expression original sin to denote that tendency towards evil which every child exhibits, and which will plunge him into a great and perpetual struggle in the realisation of his moral and spiritual being; but the doctrine of original guilt we dismiss, its scientific as well as its Biblical accuracy is impugned.

The doctrine of original sin has consequently undergone a change. Psychology has been at work using observation and experiment, and drawing upon tests from experience; and it has thrown considerable light upon the development of sin in the individual. It has demonstrated that for a considerable period the child is not a self-conscious agent, that voluntary action is gradually acquired, and that the earliest acts are non-moral, in fact, almost automatic. It has proved too, what parents have known for centuries, that good is commingled with evil in

their children's hearts, and that the bent of their natures is not wholly downward. A mother will no more deny good tendencies in her child than she can deny evil ones. In this psychology has the support of other branches of science, which affirm that selfish appetites and wilfulness and rebellious tempers which sometimes distinguish children, but not children only, are partly physical, and the natural outcome of ordinary causes.

This is accepted even by those who hold to the doctrine of a fall, who believe that whilst the evolution theory of the history of the body is true, the history of the soul cannot be explained by it. The consciousness of sin, the sure conviction that it separates and is an intruder, the shame of sin, the pain of sin, none of these is explained by an evolutionary development of man. But yet one can accept the evolutionary hypothesis so far as the body is concerned, and see in a child's proclivities not deliberate evil, but tendencies at present non-moral. So the doctrine of original guilt is being abandoned, and the doctrine of original sin modified.

And then many theologians, notably Zwingli "the gentle father of children," have held strongly that the blessings won for the race in the second man are as extensive as the blessings lost through the first man. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men unto condemnation, even so by the righteousness of One

the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." They maintain that the "all men" in the latter part of the verse cannot be a different quantity from the "all men" in the former part, that the humanity into which Christ brought blessing is as extensive as the humanity into which Adam brought cursing. "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

In the light of such passages as these Luther has said, "Through Christ original sin is annulled, and no man since Christ's coming is condemned unless he will not forsake it." "We believe," says Dr. Hodge, and the words are most pertinent to the status of infants, "we believe that the grace which is in Christ Jesus secures the salvation of all who have no personal sins to answer for"; and commenting on the last verse above quoted he says, "It is contrary not only to the argument of the apostle, but to the whole spirit of the passage, to exclude infants from the all who are made alive in Christ."

Accordingly, even if one be unwilling to accept the suggestions of science or of psychology as to the child's nature, and feel constrained to hold still to a dogmatic faith in total depravity, yet he can also hold that original guilt has been done away in Christ, and that where sin abounded grace does now much more abound. In the light of the great truth

of Christ's headship of the race, of the co-extensiveness of salvation with the Fall, one can gladly yield the child the place which Christ gave him as a member of His kingdom, and the place which the Church has given him as a member of the household and family of God.

So far from this theory involving any depreciation of the work of Christ in His life and death and resurrection, more than any other it exalts them, as it holds that because of them the child, while yet a child, is a member of the kingdom of God—they have opened its door.

Another doctrinal difficulty turns upon the nature of that spiritual change which it is felt that every son of man requires. Surely every one needs conversion, and conversion is a turning from sin to God with the realisation of our sinfulness, and of His mercy in Christ. That may be called a primal truth of Christianity, and yet it has its qualifications. In the sense in which the word is commonly used, in the adult sense of the word, little children do not need conversion. If they have never consciously wandered they cannot consciously convert, they cannot have such experiences as the hardened sinner has of God's grace, because they have not had his experience of sin. Christ's teaching implies that children, just because they are children, are nearer to Him in spirit than adults are, and conversion in the ordinary use of the term is a turning of the adult to the childlike state. On

the other hand, as we have seen, the New Testament leads us to believe that regeneration, the birth from above, is necessary for all. Now one of the main points in which regeneration differs from conversion is in the passivity of the subject. "The wind bloweth where it listeth—so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Even adults, in the birth from above, may be, perhaps always are, passive. The Spirit of God broods over the spirit of man and quickens him, and the soul wakes and grows. All is the work of the Spirit; even the response which the soul makes, that too is of God, and part of the work of regeneration. Now if, without human aid and human co-operation, the Spirit of God can quicken a hardened sinner, why should it be thought a thing incredible that the Spirit of God should regenerate little children? And if in the doing of it God makes use of the parents' faith and love and sanctified life, will the gift of God seem less wonderful or less precious because it has been ministered by human hearts?

"But surely," says some one, "this is not all; will not the children later on awaken to a conscious response to this spirit? Should they not, in due time, realise their need and their wilful sin, and find in Jesus a Saviour? Is not that necessary?" Yes, undoubtedly. It is for such a process that I contend. All along the line of their development to manhood and even to old age, there should be little conversion crises; moments when God is more clearly apprehended,

when some precious assurance is flashed into the centre of the soul, and when at one bound the spirit springs forward up a height over which years of climbing could not have carried it. And although the child's consciousness of sin is limited, it will not therefore be less real ; for the man who has ever been Christ's friend may feel sin as acutely as the man who has wallowed in it, because he has seen more clearly than the latter the vision of the perfect Man. So just as Christ through His life and death and resurrection opened for the child the door of the kingdom, through an ever-growing experience of the worth of these, He leads him through room after room, and takes him " far ben " into the heart of the mystery of love. This is happening every day ; it is the normal experience in this Christian land.

But some will feel that even greater difficulties beset us and our theory from the doctrine of election. God chooses whom He pleases ; nay, He has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world : this is the basal rock of our whole theological system. Unfortunately this doctrine of election has fallen upon evil days ; I say unfortunately, because I believe that with some modifications it may be preached positively with the greatest benefit. It can be used, as the New Testament always uses it, as a powerful stimulant to Christian people. It can help to stem the tide of Sadduceeism and materialism in present-day Christianity ; to assure men that

their times are in God's hands, and that He guides ; that the man who does His will is upheld,—there is always a Rock that is higher than he. If one asks why a doctrine once so generally proclaimed should now be so generally neglected, the answer may help to guide us to a partial solution of our difficulty. Strictly enforced, unguardedly preached to sinners for whom it was not intended, and to timid saints for whom it was, the doctrine was found to produce a paralysing effect upon the lives of many. It induced men to spiritual inertness ; they could do nothing unless God called. It led them to peep into and dissect experiences of the soul that might have blossomed into sweet flowers of assurance. It seemed to take everything out of their hand, and to put it into God's. They were either elect or non-elect, and so were their friends and their children ; if they were to be saved they would be saved. To greater minds the doctrine was as wings to soar by ; to others it was a chain, repressing endeavour, paralysing effort, and leading to fatalism. Thus whilst in theory the Church holds the doctrine, and cannot but hold it, as it seems to me, in practice she has had to close her eyes to its logical issue, and to proceed upon the working assumption that every human being may be elect. The compilers of the Confession probably believed that some children of Christian parents were elect, and some not elect^v ; but when they enclosed them all in the Church and

ordered them to be baptized, they encouraged the parents to proceed upon the working assumption that they were all elect. For practical purposes parents were to assume that, to secure Christian education for their children; for it is only upon an assumption like this that Christian education can proceed.

This fact, I think, removes some of the difficulty; and what remains can be lightened if we remember that God has by His promises made conditions for Himself as well as for us. Although He is free to choose whom He will, His will is not arbitrary, unbounded by any conditions or restrictions. He has made conditions for Himself in His promises. Despite the fact that He elects whom He will, every man may be elect if he comes into the line along which God's choice operates. Indeed every promise of God that is conditional upon human action may be called a self-limitation of God's free choice. So whilst it is true that He chooses what children He pleases, it is equally true that He has laid down conditions upon which, if they are observed by the parents, their children will be chosen His and kept His. He has promised that His grace will proceed along the road of Christian training, and will operate through the nurture of the Christian home; and children of such homes will be, nay, they are, His choice. We do not limit Him in the freedom of His election when we say that they will grow up Christians. He has limited Himself; and we gladly accept His

promise. Whom He will He chooseth ; and yet we have His assurance that a child dedicated to Him by faith, and brought up as His will be His always, a citizen of the household and family of God.

CHAPTER VII

BAPTISM

IN approaching the subject of Baptism I shall avoid, so far as I can, debatable ground. I shall not enter into a discussion upon the mode of baptism, or its proper subjects ; my object will be simply to show the principle for which I contend, illuminating and illustrating the Sacrament ; and, with its help, to present a clear and intelligible conception of what the ordinance means. Our authority for some recognition of the children of Christian parents is grounded upon the attitude of Jesus to little ones. He evidently regarded them as members of His kingdom, who under proper conditions should expand into full membership. He deemed them capable of blessing. He recognised their nearness to Him in spirit. We are in line with His example when we also recognise that nearness and when we lay the hands of the Church upon them in blessing, if we see the proper conditions for confirming these blessings and conveying them through a human channel. When we have reason to believe that the parents are Christian, and ready to co-operate with God

in applying His grace, we believe the blessing of God rests upon this Sacrament. We use it because it symbolises a truth which is the foundation stone of the promises, and conveys an assurance which our hearts ever need. We use it also because we believe that it was so used by the Apostle Paul. He practised household baptism. We do not know that there were children in any of the houses where he practised it, but we are not concerned about that. We interpret the expression household baptism in the light of the Jewish practice, divorced from which its origin is unintelligible; and we reach the conclusion that in the earliest days of the faith the believing father represented his household before God, and his children were baptized on his profession of faith. Many readers of the Acts of the Apostles are perplexed because they find adult baptism so frequently mentioned, while infant baptism seems only hinted at in such passages as I have referred to. They think that one proof-text about the baptism of infants would make our position strong. But, that being denied, are we to conclude that it is weak? In reality, far from being weak, we may safely claim that it is apostolic. Where the same condition of things obtains to-day as in the New Testament times, we follow the New Testament practice. In India and China grown-up converts from heathendom are baptized into the Church to-day, just as they were in Paul's time. When they marry their children are born

not into heathendom, but into a home-circle leavened with the spirit of Christ. Under these conditions they have opportunity to grow up Christians. Kingdom influences are around them ; they are " holy," they are " covenanted," and so they are baptized. Where we find the same conditions of heathendom prevailing, we follow the Church of the apostles ; where Christianity has altered those conditions, we have followed the Church of the apostles too—into infant baptism.

No doubt it is because the subjects of this ordinance may be either adults or babes that the definition of Baptism given in the Shorter Catechism fails, by reason of its wideness, to help us very much in understanding the significance of the ordinance when administered to children. Many of its sentences seem to refer more particularly and fully to grown-up men and women, and are of little assistance in our quest after the significance of this Sacrament when administered to children. Let us seek it in another way.

As my object is practical I shall take a concrete case of the child of Christian parents, and endeavour to show what, according to the teaching of Jesus and His apostles, Baptism should mean to him and to them. That child of theirs is a child of God. He is a member of the kingdom, and the father repeats the good promises to himself. This is God's child, he must grow up so ; he is a member of Christ's kingdom, he must

remain so ; more and more he must become so. He should never wander. These little feet must never walk in the far country, nor these little eyes see its dark corners of shame, nor this little heart feel the bitterness of its want. It depends upon God and me. It is not His will that my little one should begin by going astray. I have His promise that if, with His help, I do my part, He surely will not fail me ; and if I bring this child up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord, he will never depart from them.

Here, on the threshold of this great experience of fatherhood, God meets him with His promise, and, that he may realise it, it is signified and sealed home to his imagination and to his heart in the ordinance of baptism. In this ordinance God meets the father, saying, " This little child, My child and yours, I have given to thee. I will be to him a God, and he will be to Me a son. I will encompass him with My grace, I will gird him, though he knows Me not. But I need your help to make My truth manifest to him, to bring it near to him in a person. I need the home, I need the mother's hand and the mother's face and the mother's voice ; I need the father's counsel and the father's tenderness and the father's example. Will you covenant with Me to do your share, to be the willing channel of My grace ? Do you promise to bring up this child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ? " And the father, because he believes God, and because he loves his child, lays hold upon God's

promise and says, " I will," and the covenant is sealed in the rite of baptism.

So much, in general, the Sacrament means. In particular the truth signified by washing with water is that the cleansing of the soul, its regeneration, is of God, who in Christ has reconciled the world to Himself, and redeemed it through His blood. The truth sealed is the promise that God will be faithful, that He will assuredly not fail; and, although the father may know it before, he thanks God for a fresh assurance of it when he stands with his child in his arms and offers him to God in the Sacrament. Thus, for a Christian father the baptism of his child is a covenant he makes with God, promising that he will bring him up as a child of God, and accepting the sign and the seal that God will keep him so, always, in an ever-developing spiritual experience.

Now, what does Baptism mean for the child? We have seen it does not make him a child of God, or a member of His kingdom—he is that from his birth; but it declares the fact, and by sensible signs assures us of its truth; just as the Lord's Supper does not make us objects of God's love, but assures us of the fact which we have known before, and seals it home to our hearts. In this Sacrament the child is received into the Church; so much, at least, is agreed upon by nearly every one. The child of Christian parents is born into the kingdom, and in Baptism the Church receives him into its membership. Baptism is a declaration of the fact that the child is a member

of the kingdom, and a public recognition and reception of the child into the membership of the Christian Church, because his parents are believers.

In the Larger Catechism this view holds a position of importance, for the introductory sentences to the section read: "Baptism is a Sacrament of the New Testament ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, etc." It is kept prominently before the minds of Christian people when the Sacrament is publicly administered. And when special reference to it is made in the address, and the congregation, being reminded of their responsibility towards this new member of Christ's flock, rise to receive the child and receive him standing, this truth receives the emphasis it deserves. In private baptism it is apt to be overlooked or altogether forgotten.

But what more does Baptism mean to the child besides a reception into the Christian community? There are those who say it means nothing more, who insist very strongly that the child receives no benefit in the ordinance direct from God's hands. They will not deny that as he grows up he may be benefited through his parents by their faithfulness to their vows. Neither will they deny that his baptism may carry with it some prospective blessing from God to be conferred upon him when he reaches maturer years. But that there and then he may be spiritually blessed by the

immediate action of God's Spirit they do deny ; and they most emphatically deny that anything like regeneration is ever possible. One can see reasons for this attitude. It is a protest against the extreme positions of certain Churches, and, like many righteous and indignant protests, it tends to protest too much. If the sacraments are over-emphasised by some, that is not a sufficient reason why they should be undervalued by others. In our anxiety to prove ourselves free from follies, we should not part with truths, because ignorant people might suppose that our truths bear a close resemblance to those follies. If the ritualist says this Sacrament is all mystery, that is no reason for us to cry out in return, there is no mystery about it.

Another reason for this attitude is to be found in the materialistic spirit which characterises much of the teaching of the Churches of to-day. A materialistic Sadduceean conception of Christianity is very widely spread. It says : " We will accept what we can understand, and we will agree to any spiritual truth which is capable of scientific presentation ; but anything around which the air of mystery clings, anything we cannot examine and take to pieces and classify, we will deny. We can see that Baptism is a reception of the child into a Christian community. We cannot explain anything farther that may be in it, and so we deny that it is in it." To such an attitude the Church of Christ must not yield one jot of her convictions. She cannot

clip and trim the truths of her creed because others have decked themselves out in extravagances, neither can she agree to delete the mysterious out of a divine revelation to suit the spirit of the times.

“But,” asks the objector, “where have you any evidence in the New Testament proving that infant baptism means more to the child than admission into the Church?” Of proof-texts I have no evidence, none whatever. There are many verses showing that Baptism meant more to adults. There are none showing it meant more to their children. I grant that, and it will be granted to me in return that there are no verses proving or implying that it meant only this to children. There are no proof-texts on either side. But without proof-texts I think it may be fairly urged that more may be seen in Baptism than a reception of the child into the Church, if we will look deep enough. I am not contending for baptismal regeneration, or anything of that kind; I am combating the spirit which affirms dogmatically that Baptism is nothing more than a rite of recognition.

We have already shown that children are not spiritually incapable. Scripture records several instances of children who were spirit-born from their birth. The extreme youth of a child then does not present any difficulty to the Spirit of God. No child is too young to be blessed, so Jesus thought; and no child is too young to be immediately acted upon by God’s Spirit. The

efficacy of a Sacrament, says the Confession, depends upon the work of the Spirit. Why should we deny that, in answer to the prayers of the congregation, and the prayers of the parents, the Spirit of God that "worketh where and how He pleaseth" may act directly upon that little child, even regenerating him? Because others affirm that this always happens, are we to deny that it ever happens, or that it ever can happen? Are we on the right path when we are denying the liberty of the Spirit of God, or when we are exalting the liberty of the Spirit, and teaching parents to believe in His free course? There is much in the New Testament to encourage me to hope that God, who has promised that on their covenanting with Him believing parents will see their children grow up His, will be present in fulfilment of His promise and in answer to prayer in this Sacrament. How His Spirit acts I do not know, for "the wind bloweth where it listeth," but that He can act I dare not deny. I must not affirm that God may regenerate a person at any moment in life save at his baptism. According to our faith—neither according to our understanding, nor yet according to our credulity—but according to our faith, it shall be unto us.

Therefore, instead of making the whole value of the ordinance prospective, thereby very considerably lessening its immediate value to the parents by leading them to expect nothing now, we encourage them to expect a great deal; to

hope that God who has given them such exceeding great and precious promises for the child's whole life, will give him an earnest thereof when they offer him in Baptism.

When we look upon the Sacrament in this light, one or two truths impress themselves upon our minds with great clearness. No parents except God-fearing and professedly Christian parents have any right to this ordinance. It is of no value to child or to parents, except one of the parents is a Christian. One cannot help feeling in these days, when all sorts and conditions of men and women, Christians and non-Christians, demand this ordinance of their ministers, that they have been allowed to forget that it has no significance save to Christ's people. What a mockery it is when a man, himself out of the covenant, goes through the form of covenanting for his child! What ignorant superstitions must have taken the place of faith in that man's mind! People talk about the pity of denying the child a blessing because the parents happen to be faithless. We do not deny the child a blessing at all. The blessing may come to the child in other ways; through the zeal of the Church and our prayers and compassion it may come. There is no reason why it should not. But to turn a living service into a hollow formalism in the hope that some indefinite good may come to the child, is conduct in defence of which few of us have a word to say. Undoubtedly much of the disregard of, and the indifference to, this

Sacrament, and many of the anomalies connected with our practice of it, are directly traceable to the disobedience of the rules of the Church. When we return to the teaching which we profess and administer baptism only to the children of Church members, the Church may be smaller, but she will be infinitely purer. A practice which, under guise of generosity, sacrifices a principle of the faith, and causes others to disregard it, leads only to a spiritual bankruptcy.

On the other hand this Sacrament of baptism truly interpreted, may, and can hardly fail to, make a most convincing appeal to every Christian parent's heart. Here is a lever which may be used to lift the responsibilities of parenthood out of the neglect into which they have fallen. When men and women know that as they present their children to God they enter into a covenant with Him concerning them; when they are made to feel, as they dedicate their little ones to God, that their future destiny here and hereafter depends upon how that vow is kept; when they learn that they are at liberty to follow the guidance of their hearts and believe that their children are members of Christ now, and have not to wait until they grow up before they become members; when they are impressed with the fact that just as God's word reached man through an incarnate person, so does it reach men still, and that they themselves are the words that God would use to speak to their

children ; then we may hope to see a healthy, happy family religion, sweetened by love, in which responsibility is not neglected, and authority is not felt to be arbitrary because it is felt to be divine.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHILD IN THE HOME

THE home is God's opportunity for the child. There the plan of most lives is arranged and their destiny determined. There lessons are learned of God and of duty, of righteousness and of truth, which the future as a rule only modifies. There those habits of thought and of action are formed which develop into fixity of character, and those inclinations, which, when liberty comes, will draw the soul hither and thither. In the Christian home more than in any other spot in the world are forces capable of working in harmony with God's great purposes of grace. Here He may find ready co-operation, the parents stepping into line with His will, so far as they know it, and gladly yielding the influences of home to be the channels of His love. The Christian home is God's greatest opportunity for the child; and when Christian parents realise this, they will see it as their great opportunity too. That their children may grow up into a healthy, happy, Christian manhood and womanhood, is the end to which God is working, and they must co-operate. Their wills

must work in harmony with His ; as it depends upon them along with God to determine what the lives of their children will be. Humanly speaking they can make these lives or mar them as they choose. Whether their children will grow up into Christ or not depends upon the parents' zeal, upon the price which they are prepared to pay, and the work which they are prepared to do. In the face of exceptions which nothing we know can explain, we must still hold to and state deliberately the great responsibility of parenthood, which this view of the state of the child brings so clearly into prominence. "Do you solemnly covenant before God and His people that you will co-operate with Him in the Christian nurture of this child, His and yours?" that is the question put to the parent in Baptism, and when the parent answers, "I do," he has accepted the great responsibility of parenthood, with all the possibilities of salvation or of loss for his child.

His position may be illustrated by the position of the father who brought his idiot boy to Jesus, and who, with a faith commingled with doubt, besought him, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion upon us and help us." And Jesus answered, "If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth." In other words He asked for the co-operation of the father's faith in the healing of his child. He could heal him and He would if the father believed—if he made himself His helper by casting out that

doubting "if." And when the father, for his child's sake, gathered the few scraps of faith he had, and packing them into a creed cried out, "Lord, I believe ! help Thou mine unbelief !" Jesus deeming it sufficient, through the father's faith healed the child. It is along the line of this principle of co-operation that God generally bestows His blessing upon our children when they are young, using us as the channels through which His grace flows.

The work of co-operation cannot be begun too early. One of the truths which parents need to keep continually before them is that now, in his childhood, is the child's accepted time, and now is his day of salvation. Whilst, dallying with duty, they are trying to make up their minds to give proper attention to their children, these are growing more and more out of the reach of it.

Delay is perilous to God's opportunity. The story of the dilatory artist may help to convey this truth with vividness. Employed to paint the portrait of a boy, he began it, and then put the work aside for a year or two to take up some other engagements. When he returned to see the mother who had given him the commission, and asked for the boy, she replied, "The boy ! The boy is a lieutenant in the Guards." Whilst he delayed, the boy had been growing towards manhood ; whilst he was busy here and there, the boy was gone. Every day is carrying the children farther away from the power of the home

influences, out of reach of the great and noble plans which parents are still going to execute for their lives. The time must be redeemed.

There are one or two aspects of Christian home-training which are brought into prominence by our view of the status of the child in the Church, and which fall to be noticed here. First of all the child should be treated as, and so led to feel that he is, a Christian child. No dark fearful pictures of a God from whom he is by nature alienated may be hung up before the eyes of his imagination to frighten him into doing what he is told. No threatenings of God's punishments held over his head for little acts of disobedience for which his parent can and does punish him. When he bursts out into a fit of temper it will not help him, or enlighten his mind, to be told, "See ! you need a new heart." I wonder how many parents, when their temper proves unruly, would be helped by a reminder which proceeds upon the same evidence, or how many could cherish a faith in God which would prove joyful or inspiring, if several times a day it were whispered in their ears, "If you do that, God will be angry." I venture the opinion that in many homes there are children of Christian parents whose lives from day to day in the nursery and in the garden, in conversation and at lessons, have as much of the spirit of Christ shining about them, and as many evidences of God's grace as the lives of their parents ; and it is a great pity if the latter fail

to discern these, and utter dark superior hints of warning in God's name at every sight of failure.

Erroneous religious impressions are, by reason of the child's keen imagination, easily made in early life, and exceedingly difficult to eradicate. Some men born and brought up in Christian homes are exiles from God to-day for this reason, that they have never been able to rid themselves of that dark and threatening figure which, when they were children, parents and nurses held over them to frighten them into goodness. The picture impressed itself upon their minds, and its image never can be quite effaced. It alienated them from God, the God whom they naturally supposed to be the God of their fathers; and their hearts are bitter still with the memory of it, and reluctant to receive truer and more beautiful impressions.

Let the child be treated as a Christian, and let no picture of God that is not Christian come within sight of his imagination.

Then, too, the child should know that he is expected to grow up a Christian. Very early in life the Sacrament of baptism should be explained to him, with the promise that God made to his parents and they to Him. If they talk it over together, father and child, will they not both feel put upon their honour, so to speak, to do their part faithfully? The latter will see that much is expected of him, and he will offer the more. Men have been kept, and men have even been won, because somebody believed in them and trusted them. Men have been saved

because God believed in them, and they realised it. For a child to know that his parents and God too believe in him, and expect much from him, will constrain him to do his very best.

Another thing the parent should endeavour to do is to cultivate the child's spiritual imagination. One of the most useful gifts God has given to man is the eye of the heart. It enables the spiritual man to create a new world for himself, to realise the unseen, to see the invisible. To children God has given this gift bountifully. Let the parent cultivate it zealously, tenderly pruning off extravagances that are apt to be ridiculous, and teaching the child to be its master, not its slave. It is comparatively easy for a child to realise God, for that sixth sense, the sense of faith, is natural to him, and he can be helped to train it until it becomes one of his most valued ministrants. Just as in the nursery it renders him indifferent to the hardships of the present, so it introduces into his religious life the presence and the power of things eternal. It can gild work and even pain with glory ; it can bring God so near to life that His step is almost heard at one's side. By it, to use Christ's own words, the child is able to "*see the kingdom of God.*" Let the parent educate and develop that power.

Another aim of the Christian parent should be to render the religious life of the home perfectly natural and frank. This is a difficult work, and it is quite impossible to do it unless it is

begun early. It is not desirable that the home should be either a theological classroom or a prayer-meeting, but it is devoutly to be wished that natural religious conversation should not be banished from its doors. An unnatural reticence seems to be settling down on this side of family life. We have a hesitation in speaking of religion even to our children. We can talk at them in a distant, lecturing way, but to speak of our faith and theirs naturally and simply and tenderly, seems to be becoming more and more difficult.

There are homes called Christian in which the subject of religion on its deep side is rarely mentioned, is in fact shunned. "These things shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt talk of them;" "shalt *talk* of them" easily and naturally, such is the privilege of religion in the home. It is conversational, and so it may be delightfully natural. The homely way of conversation is the way to the child's heart. The lecturing air, and the lecturing voice, and the lecturing distance, are of no service to religion here. If the mention of God is a constraint, the child will feel it, and that will be fatal to religion in the home.

So much for religious conversation in the home; as for religious instruction, two things are to be remarked. It should be undertaken by the parents, and it should be carried out with the happy consent of the children. Parents are the proper people to teach their children

religion, for their covenant includes this responsibility. Other training may supplement theirs; it must not supplant it. Upon their shoulders rests the duty; they cannot delegate it and keep the covenant. It devolves on both parents alike. The father is as responsible as the mother; and for the sake of his future influence on his children, he should sometimes hear their hymns and their prayers, and teach them their texts. If he never speaks to them of religion when they are very young, they will notice the omission, and it will be impossible for him to speak to them naturally when they are older. The parents ought to be the first to convey the good news, and if it is good to them they will not leave it to another to proclaim it.

In the hour of teaching, especially in the Sunday hour, the happy consent of the children should be striven for and secured. This will entail some thought upon the part of the parent, and some diplomacy, perhaps some study too; but if the children come to look forward to the Bible hour and to enjoy it, the parent has already been rewarded. Abstract lessons and such as are beyond a child's comprehension, are a weariness to them. In teaching the Shorter Catechism the first definition should be remembered, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to *enjoy* Him for ever," as well as the child's variant, "and to *enjoy himself* for ever."

The Sunday hour is a specially sacred spot, from which the weary thought of lessons as lessons should be kept as far as possible. Should

it become a weariness to the child, God may become a weariness. Above all other hours of the week this is the hour "that the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

These two last suggestions can be summed up in one word—friendship. When parents and children are friends, there is a home. The latter do not run off to strangers with their difficulties and their trials; they come to their fathers and their mothers, knowing that they will be welcomed. And later on they bring their doubts too, without fear of being misunderstood. In the mere telling, many of these will disappear; in the presence of sympathy and love they will melt away. Upon delicate moral questions too friendship will find it possible to touch, and knowledge which might have come first to the child's mind from an evil source, will reach it unstained by any grossness.

Nor is this friendship all upon one side. For although the difficulties and trials of a parent cannot be discussed with his child, and although the latter may not even suspect them, yet God has given him a way of healing them; and many a father can testify to the restraining and the restoring influences of the gentle, caressing friendship of his little child.

In all the Christian life of the home, and in all its nurture, the parents will try to remember that they themselves are God's epistles. In their daily life and character, in their love and tenderness, in their Christlikeness, their

children may see God. They are His "living epistles." "It is well," said Professor Davidson, "and perhaps not very difficult, to write an address on a text in the Bible ; it is well to seek to explain a passage to a class in the Sunday school ; it is well to teach your children to say their good words ; but the only thing in the world that has power to move others is reality, conviction, personal character ; and all our efforts will bear little fruit unless this personal character be behind them, unless we can make others feel that the truth we are giving them is just our own selves, our own life put into words."

The eloquence of a Christlike spirit, the testimony of a devoted life, that is the irresistible word of God.

CHAPTER IX

HOW THE CHILD MAY REALISE HIS MEMBERSHIP

IN what practical ways may the Church membership of the child be realised? Supposing that the theory of his status herein advocated be true, how will it determine the conduct of the Church towards him? An endeavour to answer the question in the simplest and most practical way will be made in this chapter.

It is a question that irrespective of any theory must be fairly faced by us; for if the children of believing parents are Church members in any sense whatever, as Church members they must be treated, independently of the truth or falsehood of this theory. Church members of some kind they are declared to be. He who suspects their membership, suspects his Church. He who despises it, despises his own membership. But what aspects of their education as Church members does our position emphasise and bring to the front?

It emphasises the desirability of observing the Sacrament of baptism in public. A Sacrament which so impressively discloses the Church membership of the child can scarcely help losing

much of its significance when it is observed in private, and when there is no one present to represent the Church save the minister himself. There is no more effectual service in helping a littlechild to realise his Church membership than a baptismal service. He sees the baby brought in to the House of God, he hears the people unite to pray for it, he sees them rise, and he rises himself to receive it into the Christian fellowship; and thus the fact of his own membership is brought home to his heart as it cannot be if the service is private. Of course the infant is as a rule blissfully unconscious of it all, and far too young to look after his own interests; and it sometimes happens that whilst we hold the Sacrament that ratifies our adult membership in holy reverence, we are indifferent about the Sacrament that ratifies his infant membership. When it is observed in the public congregation, Baptism lays a fit and beautiful emphasis on the Church membership of the child.

After the membership of the child is thus sealed in Baptism, and he is yet too young to come to the church services, no very practical way of recognising his Church membership seems possible. Some congregations, however, keep a cradle roll of their infant members, and every child is visited on his birthday by the minister or a member of the Session. In this way even the youngest are made to feel that they belong to the Church, and that the Church cares for them.

As the child grows older he will probably show an eagerness to go to church. Generally he will find enjoyment in the service long before he can understand it ; and if a portion be devoted to him, he will probably become a willing and regular worshipper. Our theory makes a children's portion almost obligatory. It is very difficult for them to realise their membership when there is no part of the service into which they can enter, no psalms or hymns in which they can join, and no word of God specially suited to their needs. We encourage them to come to God's House with us, for their presence helps to give it a feeling of home ; and when they come we should see to it so far as we can that they do not feel neglected. It may be argued that in addressing them the minister usurps the function of the Sunday-school teacher. The child gets his portion in the school, say some, and as much as he can carry. As well might we say that, if the child is taught in the nursery and the schoolroom, he does not require that nurture which is only to be acquired in the heart of the home. Public worship is the great family service, the home service of the congregation. Even the child can realise this, and in the congregation, of all places, it hurts him to be quite overlooked.

The interest of the children's portion may be enhanced in several ways. If the children are asked to send suggested texts to the minister from some portion of the Psalms or a well-known chapter

of the Gospels, they will as a rule readily post their chosen verse, and be eagerly on the alert to hear it announced some morning, and to listen to a sermon on a text of their own choosing. Or a special book may be selected for consecutive weekly readings, say the First Book of Samuel, essentially a child's book, a religious primer, in nearly every chapter of which there will be found a subject to appeal to the imagination. The boy Samuel, the dark and sullen Saul, the hunted David, are subjects of which the little people never weary.

I remember hearing a distinguished writer, whose success in speaking to children is the envy of many, saying that he thought it was always advisable to speak to them on big subjects. They know all about being little lights and speaking the truth and not forgetting their prayers. Morality does not appeal to them just now as religion does. Let them have subjects into which the imagination can wander, which seem to open out beyond their vision, and they will listen and remember. It is contended that a child often carries away a good deal from an adult service, but I doubt it. Even when the words are simple there is an air of artificiality about them, something stiff and formal that it will take him years to pierce through. But apart altogether from this possibility the child cannot but realise his Church membership better when some words are addressed directly and deliberately to himself.

Statistics have shown that it is about the age

of adolescence that a child awakes to a consciousness of God in the soul. He may have had anticipations, suggestions of it, but generally it comes upon him with a keener consciousness about that age. Between the ages of twelve and sixteen the well-nurtured soul passes into the inner circle of the kingdom, and begins to know God face to face. At that age many young people are found eager to make public profession of their faith in Christ, and their love of Him ; and it is a question whether or no that is not the best time to welcome them to the Table of the Lord. To keep them back simply on the ground that they are too young may seem a wise step, and yet disastrous results have often followed from it. If the genuineness of their faith is beyond question, and if it is distinguished by that warmth and glow that always distinguish the first realisation of love, it is a serious matter to insist upon delay. To the child who feels that he now possesses that which the Church has been aiming that he should possess, it is perplexing to find that she is unwilling to recognise it ; whilst undoubtedly it is easier for him to step into line as a working member early in life, before his energies have been engaged on other and less worthy pursuits. He works for the Church more heartily and more ungrudgingly who begins early. An appeal to the custom of the Jewish Church, whose rule it is to admit children into full membership very early, may seem of little value to some, and yet it cannot be denied that

no Church has been so successful in bringing up succeeding generations in their fathers' faith. But the unquestionable affirmation of psychology that this more than any other is a spiritually susceptible age is a fact the importance of which cannot be overlooked. If this is God's most acceptable time it will not do for the Church to lose it. If He has so ordained it, she ought with confidence to use it, believing that He knows what is best. The presence of children at the Lord's Table would help to relieve the ordinance of a sombreness that many have noticed. It was never intended for old people only. The young bright face as well as the old serious face is needed to make it a true family feast.

It is at the Lord's Table that the realisation of full Church membership is consummated. The child is taken "ben," and knows himself on his own profession to be one of the household and family of God. But before he comes to the Table the Church deems it desirable that he should attend a class, and have full opportunity of knowing both the responsibilities and the privileges attending the step he is about to take. The class affords an opportunity for direct spiritual conversation. The catechumens come to it expecting to be dealt with frankly, and sometimes in private with their teacher their reserve thaws a little, and they will speak eagerly of their difficulties and their doubts.

The importance of the step they are about to take is made clear to them when the connection

between this Sacrament and the Sacrament of baptism is explained. In that others covenanted for them, now they covenant for themselves; a membership which was theirs implicitly is to become theirs explicitly. God's grace that has been hovering over them from their birth is now rejoicing over them in the full consummation of a personal confession in a personal Saviour.

The circumstances attending their reception by the Session can be made most impressive, enabling them to feel that indeed they are coming in with a welcome to the inner circle of the Church. A good plan is to draw up a simple personal confession of faith, with which they are made acquainted when the class commences. A copy is handed to each member, and they are told that they will be expected to sign it in the presence of the Session before admission. After the minister has introduced them on that occasion, the confession is read, a book in which it is written is laid on the table, and each comes forward to affix his name.

This method has something to commend it in that it relieves the direct question from seeming an intrusion or a mere formality, whilst the book yearly becomes a more precious possession to the minister.

It is to be regretted that there is no special service in some Churches for the admission of young communicants except that which consists simply in reading their names to the

congregation, and leading all present in special prayer for these new members. But even such a simple service can be so conducted as to be impressive.

When the child has publicly confessed his allegiance to Christ at His Table, and has accepted the responsibilities of full-grown membership, the Church has not done with him. She is responsible more or less for his increase in knowledge and his growth in spiritual stature, and she must see that he has opportunities of realising and developing himself in Christian service. We do not call a man saved when he has become a conscious believer in Christ. The work of grace is not finished then, it is only beginning. To his newly awakened and expanding spiritual life the Church has a responsibility. He is partly intellectual, and in the culture of his intellect, at least upon the spiritual side, she must do her part. One is struck with the frequency with which Paul prayed that his converts might grow in knowledge. He never forgot that, as their spiritual overseer, he was more or less responsible for their intellectual development. Some special training in the knowledge that edifies the Church owes to her young members, and the Bible-class has been found to afford the best means of discharging the debt. There is less formality in it than in the regular service. Difficulties can be faced boldly, new views of truth can be suggested, doubts can be brought out into the open and fought,

the books of the Bible can be placed in their historical setting, and the doctrines of the faith can be shown in their growth and development. The youth learns to come to the Book with a student's keenness as well as a Christian's expectancy.

Whilst the Bible is *the* book for a Bible-class, other books should be studied too if the time permits ; the great books of devotion that have helped to fashion so many souls, and the great works of the poets that have caused so many hearts to thrill with ambitions after nobility of character. The increase of literature in our time and the increased facilities for reading have laid increased responsibility on the Church for the intellectual life of her members. Her duty is not only to make men good, but to keep them good and to make them better.

In Christian service too the young members may realise their membership, and the Church should find opportunities for them and encourage them therein. In congregational work as at present constituted it is hardly possible to find an outlet for the energies of the young. If all our young communicants were to come to us asking for some congregational work to do we should be hard put to accommodate them. To establish relief works for their sake specially is unadvisable, but much might be done if there was a well-graded rotation of our offices. Of course the main thing is for the young communicant to feel that he is God's fellow-worker, that he can work with Him and for the Church anywhere,

and that the responsibility of Christian service extends far beyond the shadow of the church building. The better a man serves God outside the congregation, the better Church member he is, while at the same time he thereby realises that wider Church membership in which are included, irrespective of denomination, all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity.

Throughout the whole work of the Christian development of her members the Church will respect their individuality. It is of God's making. In the early Church there was glorious diversity along with vital unity, and to that combination she owed much of her wonderful success. She still must have room for, and still must aim at producing, all kinds of men, loving and serving the same Master in gloriously different ways. Loyalty to Him is the great essential, and where this loyalty is found there should be large liberty.

CHAPTER X

THE CHILD IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

WHAT is the aim of Sunday-school teaching? With what deliberate intention does the teacher go to the school to meet his class? In his preparation, in his prayers, and in his teaching, what is he endeavouring to do? It is a good thing for teachers to put the question to themselves and to formulate an answer to it. If they have only a hazy idea, if they do not know what they want to accomplish, it is more than likely that they will accomplish nothing.

Their answer to the question will depend upon their view of the place of the child in the Church and in the kingdom. According as they regard his place therein as of no consequence or of real value, according as they look upon him as an outsider or an insider, their answer will be determined and their efforts directed, and they will either train him as a child of wrath who needs to be converted, or as a child of God whose great need is to realise his sonship in Christ Jesus. To a question so important as this all teachers must endeavour to find an answer. They owe it to the children whom they teach, they owe it to the Church

which has appointed them to the position, and they owe it to parents who have covenanted for their children in Baptism. For the most part no servants of the Church of Christ have filled their position more honourably than Sunday-school teachers, who from week to week and from year to year ungrudgingly give time and thought and labour to their noble task, often blamed, rarely praised, and almost as rarely thanked. It is in no critical spirit that I suggest that they should have a clear aim and a deliberate purpose before them in dealing with these children; and should always feel that the responsibility of their position is no less than its honourableness, and that it demands of them that they should not work in the dark, nor out of harmony with the mind of the Church and the faith of those Christians who have entrusted children to their care.

Supposing then that a teacher believes the position of this book to be the true one, what should the aim of his teaching be? So far as I have been able to frame an answer for myself, it embraces (1) instruction, (2) the awakening of the spiritual experience, (3) the developing of the individual personality. A short elucidation of these three points may afford some suggestions of practical value.

(1) Instruction pure and simple with the object of increasing the pupil's store of knowledge is part of the object of the Sunday-school teacher. Although not by any means the most important

part, it is an essential part, and the temptation to do this work in a slovenly manner because it is not deemed spiritual must be keenly resisted, and all the more keenly because the temptation often decks itself in the guise of piety. God will not bless the child according to our cleverness, but He certainly will not bless it according to our laziness. The intellect is of His making, and He requires us to dedicate it to Him and use it in His service. Honest intellectual work done for Him is spiritual work. The man who does it is not only blessed in an increased knowledge of God, he is blessed in the very acquisition of it. The preparation of the lesson is really essential to the preparation of oneself. Study must be put into it. He who goes with the lesson unprepared, goes with his heart and soul unprepared.

If instruction is to be successfully given, several rules and practices should be observed, all proceeding more or less directly from the position that the child is capable of spiritual education.

(a) In the preparation of the lesson the teacher must not only learn it, he must translate it ; for the child sees not as he sees. He should imagine the class before him, and with them as silent critics he should endeavour to find such a way of setting forth the truth that they will be compelled to listen. We practised this plan, a class of Sunday-school teachers and myself, for some months in the country, and we became quite keen upon it, quick to spy the points that a

child's eye would notice, and to give them due prominence. A lesson most carefully prepared has often failed because it was not translated ; the teacher talked it to the child, not in the child's speech, but in his own, not with the child's emphasis, but with his own. Translation is an essential element of successful teaching.

(b) Another most desirable thing is that the lesson if possible should have a title, at least, in the teacher's mind ; he ought to seek for and to find one leading idea which he is prepared to make the central and dominant idea of the lesson. He should be able to say to himself, " Now *this* is my subject to-day, and I have half an hour to leave the impression of it upon the minds of the children."

Unless this unifying work is done, the lesson will hardly be a success. If every verse has some different unrelated truth of its own, the child will carry nothing away. Let him have one idea on which to hang the others, one big central truth. If he goes away with that the teacher has done well. In other words we must label our Sunday package when we have got it ready, and remember that mixtures may be pleasant occasionally, but that the System of Lessons provides for them, once a quarter, on the day of review.

(c) If possible the teacher should avoid abstract words and use only concrete ones. As I have already suggested, the teaching of the Old Testament is to a large extent teaching through pictures

and images. Even the prophets occasionally acted their prophecies, to the bewilderment of their hearers and to our bewilderment too. Christ's general method of teaching was by images. He appealed to the imagination. He embodied the truth in parables and metaphors. The child's mind will listen vaguely to abstract advice and abstract truth, because he finds nothing in them to hold by, and they slip past. When difficult lessons, say from the Epistles of Paul, or the sixth chapter of John, are on the programme, it is almost impossible to teach them, and the conclusion is irresistible that for young children they should not be selected. A positive concrete truth embodied in a picture the child will see and remember.

(d) One other object in his instruction the teacher should observe. To instruct is not to din facts into a child's head, but to make him take in those facts himself of his own free will. Isolated facts, odd links in a chain that has been broken, are of little use to anybody. If the child is to take in facts they must be related to something that is there already. An idea cannot be put in to stay unless there is a kindred idea there already to constrain it to abide. Consequently the child and the child's mind must be thoroughly known. His home life, his school life, his interest, his reading, in all these the teacher may find willing helpers in the training of his character.

(2) But the instruction of the child is not

the chief endeavour of the teacher; he aims at awakening the spiritual experience of the child and leading him to know God personally, and to see Him in the events of his daily life. Children are nearer to the spiritual world that lies about us than grown-up people are, and they have such powers of spiritual imagination that they can realise it easily. Some of their religious ideas may be fanciful and will require trimming, but none of them should be laughed at or roughly handled, for they can be used to lead to more substantial and more vital truths. The "Teacher come from God" did not correct all the imaginative dreams of His disciples, nor did He rudely lop off the extravagances of their hopes; instead He used their fancies to conduct them to higher things. In other words He employed the method of illusion, and so should the Sunday-school teacher; nor should he be too anxious to have the child see with a man's eye before he reaches manhood.

These spiritual things that the child is able to see with the imagination the teacher will endeavour to relate to personal and practical religious experiences. His main business is to teach the use of the personal pronouns in religion, to lead the child to say "my God" "my Lord," "Who loved me and gave Himself for me." The spiritual awakening of a religiously trained child, as has been said, comes as a rule when he is in his teens. It is most normal then and most natural, and Sunday-school teacher sought to look

for and expect its coming, and do all they can to prepare the way of the Lord. Gently, tenderly, gradually as the coming of the dawn He comes, and the teacher who has seen His coming has received his reward.

This great aim should be ever deliberately before the teacher, and should determine the whole character and method of his teaching. To lead a child of God to know his Father consciously and personally is the task God has given him to do. To achieve this task he endeavours to relate the child's early conceptions of God to his daily life and especially to his actions. He encourages him to look for marks of God's presence in the blessings of his home, and in the manifold bounties of nature that are around him ; for the child or the man in whose heart thankfulness is kindled is not far from a consciousness of the presence of God. With the help of illustrations he shows the child the laws of righteousness as laws of God, rather than as laws of nature ; the shame in sin, and the truth that the sin of one brings pain to many, he interprets as warnings rather than as threatenings of anger.

And so the child is led toward a noble and tender conception of God, whilst at the same time he is encouraged to practise His presence every day until He becomes a conscious experience of the soul.

This is one of the difficult tasks that a man can set himself to perform, to make God person-

ally real to a child. It requires much thinking and planning, it requires character and prayer ; but if he is in earnest about it, and if God speaks through him and in him, the teacher will not wholly fail. If after three or four years' teaching the child leaves him with a happy healthy sense of God's presence in his life, and with the feeling that God's grace surrounds him, the teacher has done a work that never can be undone. What he has written God has written, and it will abide for ever.

This aim will receive its due and proper emphasis when the status of his pupils as children of God, Christians in the becoming, is kept clearly before the teacher's mind. They are not exiles who need to make peace with God for sins not their own, neither are they heathen to be converted. The Church has called them, and baptized them members of the family and household of God. God has called them by His name—they are His. Their relationship to Him confirmed by Baptism should often be explained to them, and they should be encouraged to look forward to the time when their own faith will ratify for them the full blessings of the covenant in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Such teaching will lead them to see that this consummation is the devout wish of the Church and her confident expectation, and that it is reached when the soul can say, "My Lord and my God."

(3) It must never be forgotten that the child's

individuality is to be respected and his whole personality drawn out. He is one of God's creations, different from any other that ever has been. God has made him different for some reason, and the purpose of God must be respected. Education is, as the root of the word signifies, a drawing out. It does not consist in putting so many ideas into a compartment, but in drawing out a character. It is not necessary, neither is it desirable that the child should come to think the teacher's thoughts, and to repeat his shibboleths and look at religion from his point of view. We need a little more sanctified originality in our religious life at present, a little more daring resolve to be true to the self that God has made; and care must be taken not to repress that for ever in the Sunday school. It was Christ's own disciples who coldly criticised the great original act of the woman in Simon's house who anointed Him for the burial. Her action was not dignified, they said; it was wasteful! They would have repressed an act that was great, just because it was the expression of a personality, and thus they would have denied our Lord one of the deepest of His joys. "Not that we have lordship over our faith, but are helpers of your joy" is an excellent motto for teachers to carry in their hearts. God is teaching and training these children as well as we. The plan of their lives is in His hand. We must co-operate, not determine. We must ever leave scope for the breath of the Spirit, for the out-

working of the purposes of Him who has made all His children different.

The writing of this little book upon a subject which for me possesses deep interest has now been accomplished, I trust with some measure of clearness and simplicity. Very early in my ministerial life I was compelled by my own ignorance to study the Sacrament of baptism, and that study led to the wider subject of the place of the child in the Church, and the nature of religious education.¹ For several years, in leisure moments throughout the winter and in summer holidays, I gave what time I could to the subject ; and finding that others like myself were dissatisfied with the seeming aimlessness of religious education and the precariousness of the position of the child of believing parents, I resolved to write this little book.

It first took shape in the forenoons of a quiet holiday by the seaside ; the voices of two happy children often reached the room, and the promise of a romp with them on the shore in the afternoon lent an impetus to a slothful pen. The hope was in my heart then, and is in it still that the book, in spite of all defects, might appeal in the children's name to the Church of Christ, for a kinder, more generous, and more secure recognition of their relationship to Him, and of their membership in the Church which He purchased with His own

¹ Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* opened for me, as for many, the door of hope.

blood. So the object of the book is really a missionary one—to plead the cause of the little child. If it helps parents and Sunday-school teachers and workers among the young to hear more clearly the Christ of God saying, “Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not,” if it stimulates them to think more seriously of what He meant when He said, “of such is the kingdom of God,” if it enables them to get a glimpse of the children in His arms with His hands upon them in blessing, and if it stirs them to love these little ones more tenderly for His sake, it will have done that which it is sent out to do—in His name.

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